

HB 371 Testimony

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I am a breast surgeon, fellowship trained, and have been in practice at the Barrett Cancer Center within the University of Cincinnati Medical Center for 24 years. I serve as the Breast Surgical Director. I am familiar with the limitations of mammographic screening as I evaluate my patients. The sensitivity of a mammogram in finding a cancer could be as high as 95% if the breast is not dense, but as low as 70% or worse if it is dense. It can also vary with the type of cancer that may be present, because some are not easily seen on mammogram. Despite normal screening mammograms, I have found palpable cancers in current patients on clinical exam. Concerned new patients may come to the office because they found a mass on self-exam after a recent normal mammogram. Unfortunately, not all cancers can be felt on exam and some may be as subtle as a thickening, which would be missed in someone with a dense breast.

Currently, those with a dense breast on Medicaid do not have the option of screening with mammographic tomosynthesis—a method of taking mammogram picture slices through the breast. Overlying breast density can be separated in this context as it has fewer overlying shadows that can be misleading. It has been shown to be very helpful for those with dense breasts. Individuals who may be considered high risk because of prior biopsies, density of their tissue, and/or a family history of breast or ovarian cancer may have private insurance who will fund a screening breast MRI. An MRI can subtract the density and identify cancers early, resulting in improved survival. At present, Ohio Medicaid does not allow for that. As a breast cancer survivor with formerly dense breasts, I could have slipped through the cracks had my breast imaging been funded by Ohio Medicaid. The impact of a delayed diagnosis can mean bigger tumors, possibly greater lymph node involvement; these are aspects of cancer staging. And with a more advanced stage, the treatment becomes more complex, more costly, and overall survival declines. The best outcomes in breast cancer treatment result from finding it at the earliest stages. Women with dense breasts deserve the opportunity to screen with tomosynthesis, or breast MRI if indicated, and be diagnosed at the earliest stage possible if they have breast cancer.