

Chairwoman Manchester, Vice Chairman Cutrona, Ranking Member Liston, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for allowing me to share my proponent testimony of House Bill 371 today to help women gain a greater foothold in the fight against breast cancer. My name is Tamara Eggleton and based upon my own experience, I believe that the most powerful shield in this battle is early detection. However, there is not a one size fits all screening test for breast cancer diagnosis and that is why HB 371 is so crucial for women with dense breast tissue.

I am a 47 year old, Summit County resident who received annual mammograms since turning 40. Each year I was informed there was nothing of concern identified. I was also notified in writing that I had dense breast tissue. Although this information was meant to be helpful, it just wasn't very useful. I still believed that annual 2D mammograms were my best and only option for detecting breast cancer early. The revised language in the notice included in this bill is much more clear and informative that a women with dense tissue could benefit from additional imaging tests.

In January 2020, I started having unusual breast sensations and obvious skin dimpling and puckering of the right breast. I knew something was wrong. I underwent a traditional 2D mammogram, and tomosynthesis (or 3D mammogram) and also a breast ultrasound. All three of these tests were read by doctors as being negative. No cancer was detected or suspected.

As covid swept across the world in the following months and most were confined to their homes, I became increasingly uneasy about my condition and sought out an appointment with a breast surgeon in July 2020. Even though I had what she referred to as "severe dimpling" and dense breast tissue, the doctor told me that she would not order an MRI because in her past experiences the insurance companies would not approve that test without more evidence on the previous screenings administered. On that day, the years of repeated denials by insurance became my care giver. It was not about my health or what screening test was best for me. It was about the money. My heart goes out to every woman who has been denied the accurate testing she needed due to the cost even when the technology of an MRI was available but overlooked.

The small ray of hope in my story is that I randomly chose to see a doctor from University Hospitals that day and she mentioned the option of a self-pay fast MRI that UH offered. To my knowledge, UH is the only hospital system in NorthEast Ohio that offers this option. I paid for this test without hesitation.

The fast MRI revealed that I had breast cancer. The mass was larger than 2 inches and had spread to my lymph nodes. This was discovered in an advanced stage even though I had been going for annual mammogram screenings the past 6 years to ensure early detection. These mammograms failed me because dense breast tissue can mask cancer.

MRI revealed my cancer. Ultrasound did not. Mammograms did not. And yet I had to pay for the MRI out of pocket because insurance would not cover this test historically.

In the past year, I have undergone several surgeries, chemotherapy, radiation and various treatments to stop the spread of this disease. And by God's blessing, I am able to share my experience with you today.

My story is not unique. More than half of all women have dense breast tissue and that condition puts them at greater risk for cancer regardless of family history. There are numerous medical studies that support how useful MRI is to the early detection of breast cancer in women with dense tissue, but only if it is used.

Early diagnosis prevents costly treatment and more importantly saves priceless lives. HB 371 is the next step for Ohio to ensure that women are not denied the proper tests needed for early diagnosis. For myself, that was an MRI. For another woman, that may be a 3D mammogram, an ultrasound, or even a new advancement in technology that is yet to be discovered. Either way, the decision should be made between a woman and her health professional for the best screening to meet her needs rather than making a woman wrestle against insurance to receive the best care.

The organization DenseBreastInfo.org reports that 12 other states along with Washington, DC, have laws regarding insurance coverage and dense breast tissue. I am asking that HB 371 receive the support that is necessary for Ohio to join these states who have taken action to support women and modern medicine.

Until my recent experience the past two years, I was not aware that I had better options for the early detection of breast cancer.

But now I know.

And that is why I am here.

I ask that you use this knowledge to support HB 371 and fight for Ohio's women, including my daughter, in their right to receive better health care.