

Chairman Huffman, Vice Chairman Antani, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the Senate Health Committee,

I am Tonisha Elder, and I would like to illuminate why the passing of House Bill 371 is essential. January 19, 2021, at 10AM, through MyChart, I learned that I had a diagnosis of Stage 0 Ductal Carcinoma in Situ and Stage 1 Invasive Ductal Carcinoma. My Breast surgeon later called to confirm and from that moment life has been a whirlwind. From a series of scans, tests, surgeries, post-surgical pathology changes (positive metastatic carcinoma), chemotherapy, radiation, hospital visits, and more doctors' appointments than I can count. To the hair loss, permanent burn marks on my skin, the daily pill, monthly injections, and bi-annual bone infusions that are apart of my hormone therapy, I learned quickly that cancer (or little c as I call it) and I would be in relationship for a long haul.

I never spend time feeling sorry for myself, but there are times when I reflect and ask, "How did I get here?" In December 2019 during a regular breast self-check, I felt lumps. I shared this with my OBGYN who had to write a prescription for me to have a mammogram since third party payors and insurance companies say that a woman under 40 is "too young" to be able to schedule and receive a mammogram on her own. In January 2020, I had the 2D and the findings, dense breast tissue. I was told this was not uncommon for my age and breast size. This should have been wonderful news and at the time I was elated, but I quickly learned that the imaging on a 2D mammogram is not always clear. See, cancerous tumors and dense breast tissue resemble each other both appearing white and dense breast tissue can be a warning sign of cancer.

September 2020, I noticed increased changes in my breasts, my left more specifically. Itching, burning, and additional lumps. The consistency of rigidness I previously felt was present. With so much going on like the murder of my close cousin, I put my own care to the side to be there for my family. After waiting a couple of menstrual cycles to ensure what I was feeling was not caused by menstruation, I went to my OB in December. This time I was referred for an ultrasound as the mammogram was already scheduled having one the previous year. This appointment went differently than the first. After the 2D screening, the tech quickly exited the room, returning and preparing the machine without much information. After a few minutes of observation, I asked necessary questions since this was not the same process as before. She stated the radiologist wanted a "closer look". The 3D mammogram focused on the left. During the ultrasound I noticed more captures on the left as opposed to my right. It was in that moment that I knew. The ultrasound tech stated that the radiologist may come and speak. Being who I am, I shared with her that this was not the 40's and Dr.'s was not coming in to tell you to "drive home safe." If the Radiologist was coming, there was indeed a problem.

From there I had a biopsy, and the result is what led me before you today. House Bill 371 is personal to me, my family, my friends, the representation in this room, and the people touched along this journey. Simply, lives depend on the changes in how women are screened for breast cancer and what insurance companies will pay for. At the time of my not so routine initial screening, I did not qualify for more imaging because of the lie imaging told and the limitations of the 2D. I have undergone in a year life altering changes and this continues. I have been poked and prodded on more than ever and with the health issues I already faced, that was often. I have never experienced physical affects like I do now. The emotional and mental effects of cancer are often unnoticed and at times go unspoken but allow me to share with you some of them. Anger, sadness, confusion, anxiety, depression, uncertainty, numbness, and let's not talk about survivors' guilt if you know someone who has passed because the

science could not keep up with this disease. I often find myself irritable as my hormones are being tampered with daily (and I did not need any help in that arena). This does not begin to scratch the surface of all that I, we go through. As I observe my children, they do not have the mental or emotional capacities to articulate how little c has affected them, so they exhibit challenging behavior just trying to express something, anything as they watch me fight for my life. Looking into my grandmother's eyes seeing the pain this has caused is heart wrenching. Cancer does not just affect the person but the village and that is why the passing of this bill is so important. It's imperative that WE save as many lives as we can.

January 26 2022, I was told that there was another tumor this time in my hip even after doing everything medically I was recommended to do. As I wait for the next round in the fight, I can only wonder if I had been afforded the opportunity to have more thorough imaging earlier on, how this all could have potentially been avoided especially knowing my family history of cancer. I do not know what the future holds for me, but what I do know is I will dedicate my life raising awareness and advocating for more screening options and for the age minimum for mammograms to be abolished. It's interesting that I was "too young" to receive a mammogram on my own accord but was not too young for cancer to invade my body and think, there are women younger than me. I was diagnosed at 33, a few months before my 34th birthday. Up until this point I was medically cancer free but not free from cancer and I know I will be tethered to little c for the rest of my life. I also know that I have a strong village, an amazing care team, and people championing right along with me. It gives me strength to have my dad who is with me today, an almost 10-year cancer survivor, to look to for hope. I could go on about this, but I hope my point has been made as to why this is necessary. I am not the same woman or mother that I was before my diagnosis, but because of it I hope to be better. I have the will to fight, I have the will to live, and I will do just that because although I cannot control the fact that I have cancer, I refuse to let cancer control me.

Forever In God's Grace,

Tonisha Elder



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tonisha Elder".

#TEESTRONG