

“Dr. Lower, I cannot believe I have breast cancer as I have no family history and I eat healthy and exercise daily. Plus, my mammogram six months ago was normal. Now my doctors tell me that the tissue was dense and maybe the cancer was not seen.” Unfortunately, as a breast medical oncologist these words are all too familiar to me.

I am Elyse E. Lower, MD, Director of the University of Cincinnati Cancer Center Comprehensive Breast Cancer Program and Professor of Internal Medicine. During the last 30 years as a medical oncologist, I have cared for several thousand Ohio women with breast cancer. It is disheartening to know that in some cases their cancers might have been detected at an earlier more treatable and curable stage if supplemental screening had occurred.

I am neither a breast imager nor a breast surgeon. However, I treat breast cancer patients with systemic therapies including hormone pills, chemotherapy, or biologic treatments. Participating in a regular screening program does not prevent breast cancer but it helps to diagnose breast cancer at its earliest stage.

We now know that increased breast density is an independent risk factor for cancer. Imaging with breast MRI is the best way to evaluate tissue that is too dense. Unfortunately, many women and their treating health care providers do not know what course of action to pursue when the mammogram reveals dense breast tissue. Providing coverage for additional screening with MRI can enable all Ohio women to receive the best care for dense breast tissue.

This bill is not an attempt to replace standard breast screening with mammogram. Mammography remains the standard of care for screening women at average risk. This modality was our first generation of screening. However, like other independent risks such as chest wall radiation or BRCA carrier status, dense tissue dense needs more aggressive screening. Breast MRI represents second generation screening.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony for this important issue for all women in the state of Ohio.

Please contact me if I can provide additional information.

Thank you.

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