

Testimony of Michele Young

I would like to believe the war against breast cancer began to be won by a patient with a seemingly hopeless diagnosis and doctors and legislators who would not give up hope. This is my story.

When I felt a swelling in my breast, I was not concerned. Still, I checked. There was no family history, regular normal mammograms, and I went to a women' health specialist and her own questionnaire placed me at low risk. On 9/21/2018 a screening mammogram showed a "suspected mass." On 9/27/2018, a targeted ultrasound showed this mass was 2.4 centimeters. It was breast cancer: surgery and radiation was scheduled. On 10/8/18, the MRI became back and that mass, likely missed for years on mammograms, now measured at 4.8 centimeters.

[Dr. Elyse Lower](#), the Director of UC Breast Care called me with the news. Dr. Lower said surgery and radiation was cancelled. It was too late. The cancer spread too far, past my breast.

There were palliative drugs that could extend my life.

I was too young to die. I took it for granted I would always be there for my five children, my husband, all who counted on me day in and day out. I imagined the empty seat at the holiday table, the empty chair at graduation, the empty arm walking down the wedding aisle without a mother.

"We must meet. "

That night, I met Dr. Lower. I entered the [UC Cancer Center](#) waiting room where no one is turned away, no one. There women from so many walks of life, light-hued and dark-hued, young and old, rich and poor, all with breast cancer.

"How could this be missed?"

Dr. Lower said I had dense breasts. A tumor is white. The fatty tissue of [dense breast](#) tissue is white. It is like catching a snowflake in a snowstorm on a mammogram. Half the tumors can be missed. What I had was not rare: close to half the women in the world have breasts like mine. [The science is there and in other states, I would have learned of the increased risk and offered supplemental screening.](#)

I told Dr. Lower I wanted to live.

If it had been caught early, I would have had a 99 percent chance of complete remission.

Now, I had a 1 percent chance.

Of the 100 women who entered the waiting room with me, in 3 years, 50 would be dead, the 49 others moving inexorably towards a painful death.

We would have to be very aggressive. I said if I survived, no woman with dense breast cancer would walk alone for this unnecessary suffering would end with me.

[Dr. Lower brought together an extraordinary team of oncologists and radiologists to build a bill that will be a model for the nation for early detection of breast cancer.](#) Two dear friends, [Representatives Jean Schmidt and Sedrick Denson](#), agreed to lead the effort to pass the bill for I might not have live to see the day.

This is why there is [HB-371](#). It is not for me alone. It is for all women. 1 in 8 women will have breast cancer and 75 percent have no past history. Until HB-371, there was no required coverage for all women of a once-a-year state of the art screening mammogram. Radiologists could not recommend supplemental screening when they encountered a dense mammogram to see through the “snow storm.” Insurers and Medicare did not have to pay. So in every hamlet, village and town, across the Buckeye state, mothers, daughters, sisters, and best friends, suffered and died because the cancer was found too late and they were not informed of the risk they bore. It could be you. It was me. [HB-371](#) also calls for clearly informing women with dense breasts of the risk they carry and I wish I knew so I could have protected myself.

Next year at this time, [if HB-371 passes](#), thousands of lives will be saved and tables that would have been darkened by sorrow will be lit with joy. Please pass this legislation not for my sake alone but for you, for your community for Ohio.

As for me, I am that 1 in complete remission.

No woman will walk alone as long as I am here.

Bio

Michele Young, who cannot wait for this year at the holiday table, is a daughter, sister, wife, mother of five, a [2020 Cincinnati Enquirer Woman of the Year](#) and as a [lawyer](#), the 2020 Cincinnati Bar Association’s Julia A. Stauber Honoree “in Recognition of an Outstanding Female Counselor for her Exemplary Service and Accomplishments.” She imagines all she would miss if she was not here in her family’s life, her community, and as she speaks, imagines the family tables with empty seats, the despair and the losses, that took place, simply, because we did not update the law to reflect advances in detecting breast cancer. She urges this Senate to please update the law and pass HB-371.