

RI Senate Health & Human Services Committee S2032 Testimony

My name is Colleen Converse, and I am not only a breast cancer patient, but I am the RI Susan G. Komen Advocate as well. Last session, I shared my personal cancer story from my diagnosis in 2019. Tonight I share Chapter 2 of my cancer journey,

In early June, I was advised to undergo a Breast MRI, but my life changed dramatically on June 19, 2025. On June 19th, I checked my email like on any other ordinary day. With such irony, there were two new emails on my screen, literally back to back. The first email came from Angelica Katz from Susan G. Komen, letting me know that the RI Breast Imaging Bill was unable to be brought to a House Legislature Floor Vote. Then my eyes fixed on the second email, which was a notification that my Breast MRI results had come back. As I logged into my patient portal, I learned that two suspicious bilateral masses were found.

I felt as if my heart had sunk into my stomach. My physician soon called to review the next steps, which would be a Diagnostic Mammogram, Breast Ultrasound, and MRI Assisted Biopsy. Over the next weeks, I waited for results, and I stayed awake all night, full of anxiety, night sweats, and spent my waking moments, researching molecular cell structure in malignancies, worrying about how anyone was supposed to afford thousands of dollars in a single moment's time. Most Middle Class Rhode Islanders do not have an extra \$5000 lying around, needed in a single month to determine if they have breast cancer, in this economy.

After undergoing more breast surgery, I was diagnosed with malignant breast cancer again. Soon, my whole cancer routine started again. I soon was rushed into radiation treatment, and I started hormone therapy, which has side effects of such debilitating pain that some days, I can barely function. This is going to be my life daily for the next 5 years. And if I thought Chapter 2 of my cancer journey would end here, I was sorely mistaken. Because of the long list of imaging I required the past several

months, my imaging calendar was modified. I was told by my oncologist that insurance companies were still not happy. As a result, the cancer patient's imaging protocol was cut down to a mere mammogram screening that ACA would mandate coverage for, rather than the typical diagnostic mammogram. Now the insurance companies were benefiting even more in profits because less expensive imaging was the new protocol. These screenings would be simply a red flag alert system when better imaging was required, Cancer patients would now be forced to pay the price of early detection because when something did show up, it would take longer to diagnose it. You see, insurance companies only see one magic number, the amount in profits that they would make, not the number of lives RI would save or the decrease of cancer recurrences. We know there is a link between stress and cancer diagnoses. Doctor after doctor has told me this again and again, yet we put cancer patients in highly stressful situations.

Thirty-two states have passed no cost supplemental breast imaging legislation, including every other state in New England, but RI is still lagging behind. You can't get the benefits of early detection unless you actually invest in early detection programs. So what was the wager of delaying one more year of legislation? Rhode Islanders' lives. The insurance companies still made their profits, but at what cost? My life....Your neighbor's life? What is the magic number that my life is worth? Just three weeks ago, I learned that another cancerous lesion was found. It was a little trickier this time because cancerous cells were found hiding within a benign condition. It has only been seen in approximately 139 cases worldwide. So now, I am back to the cancer routine, the tests, the visits, the terror, the game of the calendar trying to find dates for procedures, the sleepless nights....but I also have less options now. I am facing potentially losing both of my breasts and the surgical complications that go along with it, rather than simply losing one small part of my breast.

What amount is a life valued at in RI? Would it shock you to know that our neighboring states have approximated that the cost for the increase in insurance premiums, for this legislation, is less than a cup of a small coffee annually. Those same states have also found that cancer has been

detected earlier, and lives have been saved. Human lives should not be political. Cancer patients should not constantly have to advocate for the right to live. Cancer patients do not have time. We are busy fighting for our lives, day after day. As Rhode Islanders, we can do better. What's better than saving human lives? And for less than a small cup of coffee annually is all that it would cost.

Colleen Converse
Susan G. Komen Advocate