

## **Testimony by Leslie Mulcahy – A personal story speaking to the life-saving potential of this Dense Breast Notification and Education Bill S/157**

**Just one voice speaking for so many others:** For over 25 years, I have had annual mammograms (never missed one). Ten years ago, a mammography technician casually mentioned that I had dense breast tissue. She never expanded on that, and I didn't think more of it. But three years ago, it re-surfaced in my mind. My gut was telling me to look a little deeper.

Upon scheduling my yearly mammogram, I requested an ultrasound in addition to my routine screening. I just wanted a baseline for my record, a reference point for the future. I felt no lumps, no pain, no tenderness, and had a perfect annual mammogram history. I really had no concerns. But, knowing that my mom had breast cancer, I wanted to stay ahead of things. My request was denied; but I did not give up. Luckily, my gynecologist listened to me as I insisted that I wanted a baseline ultrasound due to dense breast tissue. With her help (and some creative thinking), I was able to get a referral for the ultrasound (expecting nothing but normal results, just like my mammo two weeks prior).

Thank God I did! With ultrasound, my doctor detected a suspicious lesion and a biopsy was done. On Sept 27, I received the dreaded news - the biopsy confirmed invasive stage one cancer. But wait, there's more... additional ultrasound & MRI revealed a SECOND tumor in the same breast. Neither of these tumors was detected on my "perfect" mammogram. Imagine - **TWO cancerous tumors were NOT detected on my mammogram due to dense tissue.** I was shocked! **This is the danger of having dense breast tissue - it camouflages everything.**

My mastectomy was done on Nov 27. The final pathology reported two tumors - very small, stage 1, invasive & aggressive estrogen feeding cancer. **Because of my EARLY DETECTION, I lucked out big time - all lymph nodes and margin pathology came back negative and NO radiation or chemotherapy was required.**

**According to my surgeon, had I paid attention to my "All is well" patient letter telling me to return in a year - my cancer would have progressed quickly into an advanced stage and this story would have had a very different ending. I don't care to imagine what a year's wait would have meant for my survival!** I am grateful that I was able to achieve an EARLY cancer diagnosis by virtue of the ultrasound I practically begged for. How many women will not get early detection & suffer the horrific results? Our breast cancer numbers in Vermont are quite high as it is.

**I ask you all to support this legislation, making Vermont the 25<sup>th</sup> state to make breast density notification mandatory.**

### **Supportive Points:**

- Full, unfiltered results of mammography should be shared with the patient. Revealing breast density score is a must. It will allow **all** women to be fully informed of their breast health. And when necessary, allow them a better chance for the early detection that will save their life.

- For those concerned about undue patient stress due to additional screening... trust me - there is nothing MORE stressful than getting an advanced diagnosis of breast cancer, when it could have been detected earlier. Be assured - women are resilient. They deserve full disclosure of mammogram results, the opportunity to discuss the issue with their doctor, and move forward with additional screening if needed.
- For those concerned about potential additional medical costs of further screening: (1) Due to my early detection as explained above – Blue Cross DID NOT have to pay for extensive chemo & radiation treatments or for other long term care. (2) Personally - It's a shame that the cost issue would stand as an obstacle for proper medical care and life saving efforts.
- While mammogram is the first line of defense, it may not be the last for the 40% of all women with dense breast tissue. For many, mammogram is false security – sadly they learn this too late.
- **Bottom line: No one can prevent anyone from getting cancer. It is proven that early detection saves lives. This legislation will help all Vermont women have a better chance at that early detection.**

**Seven facts about dense breast tissue (provided by [www.areyoudense.org](http://www.areyoudense.org) and the American Cancer Society)**

1. 40% of women, between the ages of 20 & 65 yrs old have dense breast tissue. That's a huge number !!
2. Breast density is one of the strongest predictors of the failure of mammography to detect cancer.
3. Mammography misses every other cancer in dense breasts. 40% of women are not getting fully diagnostic screenings with their mammogram.
4. Breast density is a well-established predictor of breast cancer risk. Breast density IS a recognized independent risk factor for the development of breast cancer. On point, the American Cancer Society has just released its publication, Breast Cancer Facts & Figures 2013-2014 and in it states: "The risk of breast cancer increases with increasing breast density; women with very high breast density have a 4- to 6-fold increased risk of breast cancer compared to women with the least dense breasts."
5. Breast density is a greater risk factor than having two first degree relatives with breast cancer.
6. 95% of women do not know their breast density.
7. Less than one in 10 women learn about their dense breast tissue from their doctors.