

Testimony of Lesa Lessard Pearson, Executive Director, New England Coalition for Cancer Survivorship

Joint Committee on Public Health

Senate Bill 1070 & House Bill 1543

June 21, 2011

Thank you to the Co-chairs and the members of the Committee for this opportunity to testify. I am Lesa Lessard, Executive Director of the New England Coalition for Cancer Survivorship. I am here to testify on behalf of the Coalition in support of Senate Bill 1070, the oral drug parity bill, filed by Senator Brewer, legislation that would require equitable insurance coverage for oral cancer therapies, and House Bill 1543, filed by Representative Stephen Walsh, relative to colorectal cancer screenings.

The New England Coalition for Cancer Survivorship exists to support and advocate for the needs of cancer survivors. Thanks to improved treatments, and an increased emphasis on early detection, the community of cancer survivors is growing each year. According to statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Cancer Institute, nearly one in 20 adults in the US have survived cancer, including nearly one-fifth of all people over age 65. This is a 20% increase in the number of cancer survivors in just the past six years. Given the alternative, the growth in cancer survivorship is a trend we want to see continue. The legislation we are here to support today is one important avenue toward accomplishing that goal.

Many of the most advanced and effective cancer therapies today, therapies that are often created right here in Massachusetts, are taken orally rather than intravenously or by injection, but these medications are treated differently by many insurers simply because of how they are administered. We believe that patients undergoing cancer treatment and their oncologists should be able to choose the best and most effective therapy without concern for how it will impact a patient's insurance coverage and out-of-pocket expenses. Senate Bill 1070 will put the necessary protections in place, and I urge the committee to give this legislation a favorable report.

One of the reasons that cancer survivorship is on the rise is due to improved screening. Early detection saves lives and prevents enormous amounts of human suffering, for patients and for their loved ones. Early detection also saves health care dollars by avoiding the need for vastly more expensive treatments to address later-stage cancers that are often in the end fatal. When it comes to Colon Cancer, which kills 50,000 Americans each year, early detection can allow for surgical options for treatment, avoiding the need for chemotherapy while vastly increasing the odds of survival. House Bill 1543 is an insurance coverage mandate for colon cancer screening that would save money in our health care system, reduce expenses for insurers, and reduce health care premiums. But most importantly, this is a piece of legislation that will save lives.

Again, I want to thank the Committee for this opportunity to testify, and we urge you to report favorably on Senate Bill 1070 and House Bill 1543.

Lesla Lessard Pearson