

House Bill 1283
North Dakota Senate Industry and Business Committee
March 18, 2025

To: Chair Barta and Members of the Senate Industry and Business Committee,

My name is Kelly Buettner-Schmidt, and I am here in support of HB 1283. Thank you for the opportunity to share with you today about my work with the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN), my personal experience with cancer, and why affordable screening is important.

Background

I am a volunteer advocate for the ACS CAN and have collaborated with the ACS since the mid-1990s. I believe in the ACS and trust their work to prevent deaths from cancer and support those who do have cancer. The ACS CAN is an advocacy organization working for effective public policies. My work as a PHN included policy advocacy actions primarily related to tobacco prevention. My PhD is in nursing with a focus on health policy. As you know, policies can affect so many lives. As a nurse, and with other nurses and doctors, we often can care for one patient at a time, but policy can impact the lives of thousands of people at a time. The ACS CAN is making fighting cancer affordable for everyone.

Personal

My large extended family includes 18 aunts and uncles, in addition to the aunts and uncles I have through their marriages. I have more than 50 first cousins. Cancer is part of our family's health history, with deaths from cancers of the breast, blood, throat, and more. My aunt died young from breast cancer. One of my dearest friends recently had a double mastectomy after a breast cancer diagnosis, at the age of 60.

Why is Screening for Breast Cancer Important

Breast cancer typically has no symptoms when it is small and easily treated, which is why screening is so important. Fortunately, early detection through screening improves survival by detecting cancer early when treatment is more effective. However, a mammogram alone cannot confirm a cancer diagnosis and is only the initial step in the early detection of breast cancer.

Diagnostic / Ongoing Screening

Follow-up diagnostic screenings help women who need more than a mammogram to determine if they have cancer. Follow-up diagnostic screenings are often needed for abnormal results or high-risk points. This may include an MRI or a higher-level diagnostic mammogram. These frequently involve significant out-of-pocket expenses, hundreds to thousands of dollars, including co-pays, co-insurance, and deductibles. These cost barriers may prevent many individuals from going forward with the screening. This is especially true among people with limited incomes, for whom these costs can be a significant portion of their income. This can lead to delayed or missed breast cancer screenings and delays in follow-up tests. Any delays can impact a person's survival.

I cannot imagine having a positive mammogram and then not having the dollars to pay for the diagnostic screening. Really screening should not be thought of as a single test, it is more of a continuum of testing to determine if a person has cancer. The costs of all screening procedures, including the diagnostic mammogram and MRIs, should be covered without costing the patients and making them decide between groceries and other bills and diagnosis of cancer. We should make fighting cancer affordable for everyone.

I strongly encourage you to support HB 1283 to increase access to medically necessary diagnostic and supplemental breast imaging by eliminating cost sharing.

Thank you for your time.
Kelly Buettner-Schmidt, PhD, RN
ACS CAN Volunteer