



May 21, 2008

House of Representatives
Energy and Commerce Committee
Subcommittee on Health
Testimony of Lifetime Television
H.R. 758, the Breast Cancer Patient Protection Act

Dear Members of the Subcommittee on Health:

In 1996, 12 years ago, Lifetime first heard about the practice of “drive-through” mastectomies, when women are forced out of the hospital hours after major breast cancer surgery, even if they and their doctors do not think they are ready to go home.

That was the year that Representative Rosa DeLauro (D-CT) first introduced the bipartisan Breast Cancer Patient Protection Act, to allow a woman and her doctor to decide whether she should recuperate for at least 48 hours in the hospital or whether she has enough support to get quality care at home. It never did and still does not mandate a hospital stay, if both the woman and her doctor feel it unnecessary.

It may be unusual for a television network to be involved in any legislative effort, but as the #1 channel for women, Lifetime has a long history of advocating for its viewers.

As soon as the network began talking to viewers about the issue of "drive-through" mastectomies, we heard from thousands of women and their families that they were indeed facing the problem and wanted Congress to take action to address it.

Lifetime went on the air with spots and launched an online petition to urge Congress to pass the bipartisan Breast Cancer Patient Protection Act. In the first year, the petition had 17,000 signatures. Today, the petition on myLifetime.com has been signed nearly 22 million times. Based on unscientific research, this may be the largest petition in support of a bill.

Routinely, Lifetime and members of Congress from both sides of the aisle, including Representative DeLauro and Senators Snowe (R-ME) and Landrieu (D-LA), have come together to present these signatures and stories to all lawmakers.

Nearly five years ago, Lifetime stood on Capitol Hill with a single mother from Maryland named Shelly Slick, who had signed the petition after she had been forced out of the hospital too soon and got an infection that delayed her chemo treatment. No one can know if the delay made a difference, but sadly, Shelly died, leaving a young son behind.

Two years ago, Alva Williams, who signed the petition from her home in North Carolina, came to the Capitol steps and recounted how, after her breast surgery, she was forced to drive three hours to get home following her outpatient surgery and then have her 80-year-old brother change her drainage tubes once she was home. She too developed an infection that delayed treatment, but fortunately is doing well today.

This January, another woman named Lynn Bradley from Maryland also shared how she was told that her double mastectomy should just be an “in and out” procedure.

Grammy-nominated singer/songwriter Jewel and “Desperate Housewives” star Marcia Cross have also come to Washington and joined the chorus to bring even more attention to the cause.

In addition to signing the petition, many women and men have shared their stories about “drive-through” mastectomies.

Ann wrote, “I had a bilateral mastectomy in April 2003 and was sent home on pain meds and with drain tubes still in place. A few days later I had a severe infection in the left side drain incision and was back in the hospital.”

Bethany shared, “I had a mastectomy in July 2004. I stayed one night and had to leave the next morning. My drains became a problem; one stopped working and became infected.”

Betty said, “I’m one of those who suffered from the ‘kick ‘em out, even with tubes’ rules. I developed a staph infection that became deadly -- I believe it would not have gotten so bad if I’d stayed another night.”

Today, the Breast Cancer Patient Protection Act is championed by more than half of the Congress, with 219 cosponsors from both sides of the aisle. The Senate bill, introduced by Senator Olympia Snowe (R-ME), has 19 cosponsors. Prestigious organizations including the American Cancer Society, breastcancer.org, Breast Cancer Network of Strength (formerly Y-Me National Breast Cancer Organization), Families USA, the Oncology Nursing Society, Sisters Network Inc. and Susan G. Komen Foundation also support the legislation.

This is a political election year, but this is not about politics. It is about people. One in eight women will eventually develop breast cancer and, according to the National Cancer Institute, more than 182,000 will be diagnosed with the disease this year. These women, facing very scary, painful and emotional surgery, deserve to have options. They should be able to go home right away if they’re ready or spend a short time in the hospital if they and their doctors think that is best.

Lifetime’s viewers, lawmakers from both parties and prominent nonprofit organizations believe this bill is an important first step to increasing research into the causes and treatments of breast cancer and to improving access to quality health care for all Americans.

For Shelly, Alva, Lynn and the millions of women and families who have shared their horrific stories of “drive-through” mastectomies on myLifetime.com, it is 12 years too late. But for the nearly 200,000 women who will face breast cancer this year, it is about time.

On behalf of the millions of women and men who have signed the petition on myLifetime.com, we thank Representative Pallone and the entire Subcommittee on Health within for the House Energy and Commerce Committee for your initiative in giving the Breast Cancer Patient Protection Act a hearing. We hope that you will move quickly in order to allow this life-saving bill to come to a vote on the House floor.

Thank you.

Sincerely,



Meredith Wagner
Executive Vice President
Lifetime Networks