

# The Connecticut General Assembly



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## **LEGISLATORS, ADVOCATES, SURVIVORS PUSH FOR PASSAGE OF SB 358 AND SB 249**

*Bills expand coverage of early detection diagnostic treatment for breast, cervical, ovarian cancers*

HARTFORD — Lawmakers in the Connecticut General Assembly were joined by advocates and cancer survivors outside the State Capitol on Wednesday for a press conference to push for the passage of [SB 358](#), a bill that would expand mandated health insurance requirements for early detection and diagnosis of breast and ovarian cancers, and [SB 249](#), which makes various changes to the Department of Public Health's breast and cervical cancer early detection and treatment referral program.

Each bill passed through its respective committees in March with overwhelming bipartisan support. SB 358 passed through the Real Estate and Insurance Committee on a 16-1 vote, while the Public Health Committee unanimously passed SB 249.

According to the [Connecticut Breast Health Initiative](#), an estimated 3,500 women in Connecticut are diagnosed annually with breast cancer. The rate of female breast cancer in Connecticut's population is 136.6 per 100,000 residents, the second-highest number in the U.S. after Washington D.C., and considerably higher than the overall rate of 122.7 per 100,000. In addition, female breast cancer is the leading cause of new cancers.

The five-year survival rate for all women diagnosed with breast cancer is nearly 90 percent, depending on the stage. The five-year survival rate for Stage 4 breast cancer is 26 percent. When breast cancer is diagnosed early and confined to the breast, the five-year survival rate increases to 99 percent.

Pushing for passage of these bills is personal for **State Rep. Gary Turco (D-Newington)**, as his mother is a three-time breast cancer survivor.

"She was lucky that the cancer was detected all three times early enough to receive treatment and be a survivor," said **Rep. Turco**. "I ask legislators to join with me and help save the lives of women and men, save precious funds for our constituents, and save money in the health care system and even for insurance companies by encouraging individuals to seek tests that will detect cancer early rather than result in very costly treatments. These bills are win-win legislation for all of Connecticut."

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"Connecticut has the second highest breast cancer incidence rate in the country. To combat this issue, we need to pass bills that require more coverage for early detection screenings. Every woman should have the same access to affordable quality healthcare services. Cost should not be an obstacle to getting lifesaving healthcare services. Like 45% of the population, I'm a woman with dense breasts and for us, we need an ultrasound coupled with the mammogram for a complete picture. And we need the insurance coverage for the ultrasound equalized with mammograms," said **State Rep. Dorinda Borer (D-West Haven)**. "I would like to thank Katie Heffernan Farrell, a West Haven resident and breast cancer survivor who has been a strong advocate on this issue. Katie's life was saved because she had access to an ultrasound which detected breast cancer in its early stages. For the women and men who do not currently have access to early detection tests, this legislation will save lives."

**Added West Haven resident and cancer survivor Katie Heffernan Farrell:** "I am a breast cancer survivor. It is only because I had insurance and was able to seek medical assessment that I am still alive. My doctors informed me that if I had been unable to seek mammogram assessment even six months later than when I'd be gone, the nature of my aggressive cancer would have led to a terminal prognosis. I was sent for an ultrasound to check my dense breasts after the mammogram showed evidence of a potential tumor. It was the two interventions in combination that led my doctors to act immediately to save my life."

"I thought that the coverage for ultrasounds had already been initiated until I spoke with Representative Borer," continued **Heffernan Farrell**. "Wouldn't it be amazing if earlier detection could lead to interventions that might spare people the need to bill their insurance — if they even have insurance — for the many surgeries, chemotherapy, radiation and continued infusions and surgeries that people like me had to endure? I sincerely hope that instituting more preventative measures will bring people peace of mind and a chance at a longer life free of the suffering that I and those like me had to endure."

**State Rep. Kerry Wood (D-Newington, Rocky Hill, Wethersfield)**, co-chair of the Insurance and Real Estate Committee, said "we're saving lives with this legislation."

"Early detection is the key to this bill," said **Rep. Wood**. "My friend and constituent, Susan Lennon, who is here with me today, felt a pain when she walked across the street with her dog. That action made her go to the doctor where she learned she was Stage 1 with ovarian cancer. But how many other women missed those signs or had no symptoms? Not only are we here saving lives today, we're also lowering our healthcare system's costs by treating these diseases in their earliest possible stage."

**Breast cancer survivor and treatment advocate Jan Kritzman**, a Newington resident who has worked closely with legislators, said that while breast cancer cannot be prevented, "we must eliminate any financial barriers to receiving essential diagnostic follow-up testing like mammograms, ultrasounds and MRIs, following an inconclusive screening mammogram, especially for the 40 percent of women with dense breast tissue."

"SB 358 ensures no out-of-pocket costs or meeting outrageous deductibles, co-pays, co-insurance or cost-sharing. Our legislators are the only ones that can make this happen," **Kritzman** added.

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"Ovarian cancer is subtle and cruel, oftentimes going undiagnosed or misdiagnosed until it's too late, this is why it's the deadliest of all gynecologic cancers. It is vital that those who are most at risk for ovarian cancer have access to the limited surveillance and diagnostic tools that are available. Ensuring these lifesaving tools are covered by health insurance will improve early detection and treatment so that fewer women and their families experience the devastating loss that this cancer far too often causes. Shockingly, 80 percent of ovarian cases are not found until its later stages - we can and must do better," said **State Rep. Kara Rochelle (D-Ansonia, Derby)**.

"Early detection is the most effective way to save lives, but unfortunately, adequate diagnostic screenings are not accessible to all. This legislation would expand the diagnostic screening services provided under the Department of Public Health's breast and cervical cancer detection program to include digital x-ray mammograms and HPV tests," said **State Rep. Jillian Gilcrest (D-West Hartford)**. "According to the American Cancer Society, Black women are 40% more likely to die from breast cancer than white women. To work towards closing this devastating gap and enhancing equitable access to care, the program would give priority consideration to women in minority communities with higher rates of breast cancer and cervical cancer than the general population."

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