

February 14, 2023

Testimony of Clare Dougherty
CEO, Brem Foundation to Defeat Breast Cancer
House Bill 376

Honorable Members:

My name is Clare Dougherty and I am CEO of the Brem Foundation to Defeat Breast Cancer.

The Brem Foundation is an organization devoted entirely to advancing early detection of breast cancer. Created 17 years ago by Dr. Rachel Brem, Director of Breast Imaging and Intervention and Professor of Radiology at The George Washington University Medical Center – and herself a breast cancer survivor - along with some amazing women from Calvert County - the Brem Foundation maximizes every woman's chances of finding breast cancer earlier through education, access programs, and advocacy. We fight for every woman to have access to the screening and diagnostics she needs, regardless of her ability to pay.

Our innovative approach to breast cancer public education, access to vital breast care, and behavioral change has led to many saved lives here in Maryland and across the DMV area.

I am here today to offer the Brem Foundation's strong support for House Bill 376, which increases access to life saving diagnostic and supplemental breast imaging by eliminating patient cost sharing.

Last fall Katie Couric dropped a bombshell when she widely shared her breast cancer diagnosis with the world. With her announcement, Couric put a spotlight on breast density as well as the fact that many women require breast exams in addition to mammograms (including ultrasounds and MRI) to address their individual risk factors, such as family history.

In fact, thousands of women each year learn they require screenings beyond mammograms.

The harsh reality is that these tests are out of reach for many, as they often require significant out-of-pocket costs — sometimes referred to as the “hidden costs” of breast cancer diagnosis.

That is where the Brem Foundation comes in. Through our flagship B-Fund program we provide crucial funding to community-based partners to identify

and support patients who can not afford to pay for essential breast screening and diagnostics, which can be a costly barrier to access for underserved communities. As with so much of healthcare in the US, vast health disparities exist in breast cancer, as black women have a 41% higher death rate from breast cancer, even though incidence of breast cancer is similar among black and white women. The reasons for this significant disparity is multifactorial, but financial barriers to breast care like so many other social determinants of health, often hit women of color the hardest. Brem's extensive experience in covering diagnostic breast exams and supplemental screening beyond mammography has shown us a significant range in exam costs - from \$250 up to \$4000 at academic medical facilities.

To date the Brem Foundation has covered the cost of scores of screening and diagnostic tests for women in the area. But the need is vast and every day the number of women who cannot cover the cost of diagnostic and supplementary breast exams grows.

For some, these costs are a reason to stop pursuing a diagnosis and an access barrier. In July I met a 29 year old woman from Guatemala named Belsie. Belsie had lost her job, she was uninsured and had found a lump in her breast. I can only imagine the terror she was feeling, as she had few options before her. Fortunately one of our community partners identified Belsie as eligible for Brem Foundation support. Brem was able to cover the cost of all her diagnostic and supplementary screening tests and to pay for all of her rides to appointments. While Belsie was ultimately diagnosed with Stage 3 cancer, her prognosis could have been far worse if it had progressed. She is cancer free and doing well today.

No woman should have to make the painful choice of paying her rent or knowing whether or not she has breast cancer. Unfortunately this situation arises all too often.

If House Bill 376 becomes law, we, collectively, will play a crucial role in giving all women – regardless of their socio-economic status – access to the lifesaving screening that they need and deserve. This bill is a critical step in reducing existing health disparities and saving women's lives in Maryland.

Thank you for allowing me to testify before you today.