

MartiNelsonCancerFoundation

1520 East Covell Blvd. B5#103
Davis, California 95616

May 26, 2009

The Honorable _____
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator _____,

On behalf of the Marti Nelson Cancer Foundation I would like to offer you our observations on the Breast Cancer Education and Awareness Requires Learning Young Act of 2009 (the EARLY bill).

Breast cancer clearly poses a threat to all women, but it is rare in young women. Better insights into the causes, prevention, detection and treatment of breast cancer in young women would be of great value to individual women and to public health in general. If we had sufficient scientific data, understanding, and medical evidence, then educating young women about breast cancer, and raising awareness of the benefits of effective preventative practices and detection methods would be beneficial. Unfortunately, truly effective practices and methods do not exist, and available treatment options are frequently ineffective. Current medical knowledge is grossly inadequate for a public health education campaign of the type proposed by the EARLY bill to be useful.

Current knowledge of breast cancer in general, and its development in young women in particular, is not as advanced as the authors of the EARLY bill imply. To mount an education and awareness campaign targeting all healthy young women about a disease that cannot be prevented with current knowledge and technology—as proposed by this bill—would be a disservice to women and could harm more people than it helps. Were an awareness campaign targeting young women to be undertaken today, it would be on the basis of current information that is highly flawed and incomplete.

A premature public awareness effort based on inadequate knowledge would deflect resources that might be better devoted to focused research to improve our future ability to prevent and treat the disease. Such a well-meaning, but misguided campaign might also dampen the important sense of urgency among members of the public that is necessary to sustain the commitment of resources required to ultimately solve the devastating problems caused by breast cancer.

Although young women are a small minority of women with breast cancer, we take their needs very seriously, and recognize the devastating impact that breast cancer and its treatment has on their lives. Our organization was named in honor of a physician who died of breast cancer as a young woman. We respect the compassion and concern that

underlies this draft bill, but we also know—from long, frustrating work—that progress against breast cancer can only be made on the basis of sound evidence and hard facts. We applaud the good intentions of the proposed legislation, but we suggest the current version of the EARLY bill requires substantial, serious re-writing if it is going to contribute to the public good.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Robert L. Erwin". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending from the end.

Robert L. Erwin
President
Marti Nelson Cancer Foundation
www.CancerActionNow.org