



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

John J. Flanagan

Senator Flanagan Working To Provide Tools For Early Detection Of Breast Cancer

JOHN J. FLANAGAN February 3, 2011

| ISSUE: **WOMEN'S HEALTH**

Senator John J. Flanagan (2nd Senate District) announced that he has authored legislation that would provide stronger preventative health care for women. The legislation would require insurance companies to cover the cost of supplemental screening for women who have dense breast tissue or who are at greater risk of being diagnosed with breast cancer.

The legislation would also require that every report a radiologist issues to a patient following a mammogram include information on breast density and information on the availability and usefulness of further screenings. This information will empower women to be more informed about their own medical situation so that they are better equipped to speak with their physicians and make decisions about their own health care.

According to leading medical studies, breast cancer is five times more likely in women with dense breast tissue but mammograms alone miss up to 40% of tumors that are present in women with dense breast tissue. By requiring insurance companies to cover supplemental screening tools and doctors to notify their patients of increased risk associated with dense breast tissue, it is believed that this will lead to earlier detection and greater survival rates.

“We believe that it should be regular practice for doctors to inform women if their mammogram shows they have dense breasts, and to educate them about what it means for their breast cancer risk,” stated Jackie Pritchard, Executive Director of the Western New York Affiliate of Susan G. Komen for the Cure, speaking also on behalf of Komen’s Central New York, Greater New York City, and Northeastern New York Affiliates. “But, knowledge is only power if you can do something about it. That's why it's important that doctors discuss with their patients with dense breasts what additional screening tools might be appropriate for them.”

Senator Flanagan started working on the change after being approached by Ms. JoAnn Pushkin of Dix Hills, a breast cancer survivor turned advocate and co-founder of D.E.N.S.E. (Density Education National Survivors' Effort). Ms. Pushkin's cancer was diagnosed later than necessary as her annual mammograms were unable to detect a tumor through dense breast tissue. Ms. Pushkin worked closely with Senator Flanagan's office to write the legislation and continues to work with him to make sure that the measure becomes law in New York State.

"JoAnn has been a tireless advocate for this legislation and I look forward to working with her and others to get this legislation passed in New York State," stated Senator Flanagan. "Women throughout our state should have the right to access all relevant medical information and our state has an obligation to make sure that those rights are protected. This law will make sure that all tools are available to women so that any breast cancer can be caught and treated early and lives can be saved."

"When women aren't told about their own breast density, and its inherent risk, we are denied the opportunity and choice to protect and advocate for ourselves. If early detection saves lives is still the golden rule, it is a safety net often denied women with dense breasts. It's hard to protect yourself against what you haven't even been told is a threat. It's impossible to begin a dialog about additional screening tools if you don't even know you should be asking about it. No one, especially any doctor involved in my health care, should have the option to keep any pertinent health information about me, from me. New York women owe much to Senator Flanagan for bringing public awareness to this issue and for his efforts in introducing this groundbreaking legislation," said Ms. Pushkin.

The State of Connecticut is currently the only state in the nation that requires this coverage. "With this life-saving legislation, the state of New York will be joining Connecticut to ensure that women are informed of their breast density for the early detection of breast cancer. A recent Harris Interactive survey found that 95% of women do not know their breast density even though it is a risk factor, and, only one in 10 women find out about breast density from their physician. With the leadership of Senator Flanagan, and the advocacy of JoAnn Pushkin, women of New York State will now receive critical information about their breast density and have access to reliable screening tools to find cancer when most treatable and the survival rate is high. The women of D.E.N.S.E. and I never had that opportunity," added Dr. Nancy M. Cappello, President and Founder of Are You Dense, Inc. (www.areyoudense.org), co-founder of D.E.N.S.E. and the inspiration behind Connecticut's legislation.