



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jack M. Martins

Senate Successful in Passing Measures to Fight Breast Cancer

JACK M. MARTINS October 1, 2013

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The New York State Senate has been successful in recent years in passing legislation that was signed into law to help in the fight against breast cancer.

In 2012, the Senate with the support of Senator Jack M. Martins passed legislation to improve early breast cancer detections. The law (S6769B-2012) increases women's awareness of the presence of dense breast tissue found during a mammography exam. Dense breast tissue can make it more difficult to detect tumors.

Senator Martins said, “This is a disease that affects practically every one. Early detection is the key to combat it. This important law will help save women’s lives by increasing their awareness of a known breast cancer risk factor. Along with routine breast cancer screenings, the information provided by physicians to those with dense breast tissue can help increase early detection of the disease and give patients a greater ability to make educated decisions about their health.”

Under the law, patients receive a mammography report in plain, non-technical language about a finding of dense breast tissue and will also be given information about how they should discuss the potential benefit of further screenings with their physician.

Mammogram films of breasts with higher density are harder to read and interpret than those of less dense breasts. Approximately 40 to 50 percent of tumors in dense tissue may not be detected since this condition obscures their presence. According to leading medical studies, breast cancer is four to six times more likely in women with dense breast tissue.

In spite of the risk factor presented by dense breast tissue, a recent Harris Interactive survey found that 95 percent of women do not know their breast density, and less than one-in-ten women learn about breast density from their physician. Prior to this new law, there were no legal requirements for patients in New York to be alerted to breast density.

In addition, another bill was passed (S3801A-2011) that requires insurance to cover reconstruction after partial mastectomies and not just full mastectomies so that women who undergo a partial loss of a breast have the same option of reconstruction. This bill was signed into law in 2011.