

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-3302

November 2, 2015

The Honorable Fred Upton
Chairman
Committee on Energy and Commerce
U.S. House of Representatives
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Frank Pallone, Jr.
Ranking Member
Committee on Energy and Commerce
U.S. House of Representatives
2322-A Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Upton and Ranking Member Pallone:

As a nurse who practiced for more than 21 years and a breast cancer survivor diagnosed in her 40s, we understand the importance of catching cancer as early as possible. Further, we are aware of the severe consequences that result from delayed detection of cancer. Therefore, we are writing to share our concerns about how recommendations by the United States Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) could have a detrimental impact on the continued ability of women to access mammography services to ensure early detection of breast cancer.

In May, we helped lead a bipartisan, bicameral letter to Secretary Burwell to express concern that the USPSTF's proposed screening guidelines could negatively affect the ability of 22 million women, ages 40 to 49, to access mammographies. The draft recommendations give annual mammograms for women in this age group a "C" grade. This means, according the Task Force, women in this age group do not need an annual exam. Additionally, many insurance companies use these guidelines as the basis for coverage and cost-sharing, and these women could be at risk of losing coverage for life-saving detection.

This is a concerning situation for women and their doctors as the USPSTF's proposed guidelines, which could be finalized at any time, are misleading when compared to other leading women's health and cancer organizations. For example, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG), the National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN), the American College of Radiology/Society for Breast Imaging (ACR/SBI) and the American Cancer Society (ACS) all recommend different ages for preventative screenings. The chart below demonstrates the significant differences among respected organizations that publish breast cancer screening guidelines.

	Leading Women's Health and Cancer Organizations				USPSTF
	ACOG	ACR/SBI	NCCN	ACS	USPSTF
Age to Start	40	40	40	45	50

We have come together again because we recognize that these conflicting recommendations only confuse women and their doctors. With many varying recommendations, a pause is required to ensure clarity so that millions of women are not left without coverage to life-saving screenings. This is especially critical for women in the 40 to 49 age group, since approximately 25 percent of breast cancers occur before the age of 50. During their 40s, women are often providing for their families, raising children, and leading in their communities – and some are even elected to serve in the U.S. Congress. Providing services to aid in the timely detection of breast cancer can reduce the risk of jeopardizing these dreams.

As you know, in July, we introduced the **Protecting Access to Lifesaving Screenings (PALS) Act** (H.R. 3339) in the U.S. House of Representatives. Additionally, similar legislation was introduced by our colleagues, Kelly Ayotte (Sen-NH) and Barbara Mikulski (Sen-MD), in the U.S. Senate. This bill would protect access to screening mammographies for women, ages 40 to 74, by placing a two-year moratorium on the implementation of the USPSTF breast cancer screening recommendations. This moratorium would provide essential time to have an open and thoughtful discussion among patient groups and the leading experts in this clinical area. This discussion could alleviate concerns and allow for clarity on the current guidelines. It is our hope that we begin this important discussion by allowing the PALS Act to proceed through regular order in the House Energy & Commerce Committee.

We stand ready to assist the Committee and the Subcommittee on Health in this effort, so millions of women across America can be reassured that their concerns are heard. We must ensure a clear consensus on this important issue.

Sincerely,

Renee Ellmers (NC-02)
Member of Congress

Debbie Wasserman Schultz (FL-23)
Member of Congress