

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-2003

April 20, 2015

The Honorable Sylvia Mathews Burwell
Secretary
United States Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Burwell:

Thanks for all you and your Department have done over the years to improve access to health care for women nationwide. Today, I write urgently to request your assistance in helping to safeguard women's access to free, annual mammograms.

As you know, the United States Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) has just issued a draft recommendation that could threaten access to important preventive health care for millions of American women. I am requesting that your Department take swift action to reassure the American public that you will do everything within your power to ensure the continued availability of free mammograms for all women aged 40 and older.

We know that early detection of breast cancer offers women their very best chance at a cure and at survival. Mammograms are essential for that early detection. Mammography has helped reduce breast cancer mortality in the United States by nearly one-third since 1990 because it helps detect breast cancer at its earliest stages. In fact, studies indicate that mammograms show changes in the breast up to two years before a patient or physician can feel them. Two years!

It is also important to note that breast cancer afflicts women of all ages. For instance, one in six breast cancers occur in women aged 40-49. That is why the American Cancer Society (ACS), the American College of Radiology (ACR), and the National Comprehensive Cancer Network all recommend that women aged 40 and older should have a mammogram every year. In addition, the National Institute of Health's National Cancer Institute's webpage states that annual mammograms "can help reduce the number of deaths from breast cancer among women ages 40 to 74."

For all the reasons outlined above, I authored the "Women's Preventive Health Amendment" during Senate consideration of the *Affordable Care Act* in 2009. My amendment, which passed with bipartisan support and is now law, ensures that women aged 40 and above are able to receive *free* annual mammograms. To be clear, my amendment does not mandate that women receive a mammogram at age 40. What it says is this: women should discuss breast cancer and the benefits of mammography with their doctor. If a woman and her doctor decide that a mammogram makes sense, my amendment ensures she can get one. For free.

Unfortunately, today's draft recommendation coming out of the USPSTF threatens to erode the mammogram benefit in current law. If the recommendation is finalized in its current form, the end result would be that only women aged 50 and older would be eligible to receive free mammograms on a biennial basis. I think this recommendation is short-sighted and could potentially put women's lives at risk. Failing to identify women in their 40s with breast cancer and instead having them wait until age 50 to get a mammogram is not only a disservice, it is a travesty.

Therefore, I would urge you and your Department to explicitly and publicly assure women that Medicare and private insurance coverage for breast cancer screening will not change as a result of the USPSTF's latest draft recommendations. Further, should the USPSTF's recommendations be finalized, I would strongly urge that all appropriate actions be taken by the Department of Health and Human Services to ensure patients' previous access to breast cancer screening is not impeded, discouraged, or eliminated. Finally, should the draft recommendation be finalized, I will actively and aggressively pursue all legislative options available to ensure that women aged 40 and older are able to continue receiving free annual mammograms. Thank you for your attention to this vitally important issue.

Sincerely,



Barbara A. Mikulski
United States Senator