

Testimony in Support of SB 746 - Health Insurance - Step Therapy or Fail-First Protocol

Senator Thomas M. Middleton, Chair
Senator John C. Astle, Vice Chair
& Senate Finance Committee Members

Let me express my thanks to everyone for giving me the opportunity to share my story. My name is Dorothy Spriggs. I am a patient as well as a survivor of CML (chronic myelogenous leukemia). My story also represents the countless stories of other blood cancer patients who also have had challenges accessing their life-saving medications. This bill has a huge impact on many of us here in Maryland affected by cancer.

In 2000, I received news of being diagnosed with CML. The first medication prescribed was an injectable, Interferon. I had to use that for 9 ½ months, because my insurer at that time would not allow me to take a new drug on the market. Interferon showed very little positive change, and had terrible side effects. With my physician's support, I was finally able to go onto a new oral chemotherapy drug, Gleevec. After a short time, the drug showed a marked positive improvement for me, and has helped me maintain a good quality of life. I am still on this drug.

While working, I had coverage in a group health and drug plan with the company I worked for. Because Gleevec was considered a specialty drug, my co-pays were very high and difficult to pay. Since I retired, affordability is still well out of reach. Financial assistance is still a must. I am one of many patients who have a blood cancer, fighting every day to stay alive. All of us fight constantly to find help to pay for our medications and treatments. These concerns create emotional and financial stress. All of us need every bit of strength to fight the enemy that has invaded our bodies.

I am not alone. I hear stories often from other blood cancer patients who have not been able to get timely access to drugs that may save their lives, because of insurance clauses that make them stay on an ineffective drug for a long time before they are able to try the next drug that their provider deems appropriate as a next line of therapy for them. However, some of these new drugs are considered specialty with very high out of pocket costs for their treatments. Imagine your life span being measured by the ability to get much needed medications. This situation places a great deal of stress on many patients and caregivers. I hope you remember this story as you consider this bill. My story represents the stories of many cancer patients. Patients like me, who cannot afford specialty medications without help. When we can't afford it, we don't have access to these medications. Without access, we will die from our cancers. I'm begging you, urging you, to make a conscious act to pass this bill. Our lives are in your hands.

I thank you again for reading my story and taking it into consideration when you discuss this bill.

Dorothy E. Spriggs
Survivor of CML, District 12
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