



Senator Holly J. Mitchell

SB 1034 – Dense Breast Tissue Awareness

THIS BILL

SB 1034 removes the January 1, 2019 sunset in Health and Safety Code section 123222.3 (SB 1538, Simitian; Chapter 458, Statutes of 2012) thereby making the referred law permanent. This code section requires that a patient receive information about breast tissue density on their federally required mammography report if they have dense breast tissue.

PROBLEM

The National Cancer Institute estimates that one in eight women will develop breast cancer in their lifetime. Women with dense breast tissue are both at an increased risk of developing breast cancer and at an increased risk of having that cancer missed by mammography.

A large-scale (over 200,000 women) 2017¹ study conducted by UCSF found that the risk of developing breast cancer associated with dense breasts “eclipses that of all other common risk factors, including personal and family history.” Further, there is substantial evidence that as density increases, mammography’s sensitivity decreases. This is because both dense tissue and cancer are visually similar on a mammogram. This can result in missed cancers, delayed diagnoses and cancer found at a later stage of development, which adversely affect breast cancer outcomes.

Prior to the enactment of SB 1538, the measurement of breast tissue density taken during mammograms was not disclosed to patients. Therefore, patients with dense breast tissue were unaware of their increased risk and of the lower reliability of mammography. And indeed, rates of false negatives are higher among women with dense breast tissue. Many of these women developed advanced cases of cancer that could

have been caught earlier had they sought a supplemental MRI or ultrasound screening.

SOLUTION

SB 1034 continues the intent of SB 1538 by permanently requiring that patient mammography reports contain specific language notifying patients with dense breast tissue about the increased risk and masking effects, and encourages them to have a conversation with their doctor about whether supplemental screening is warranted. SB 1538 was approved unanimously by the Legislature.

In the five years since the enactment of SB 1538, similar laws have proliferated, with 30 states now requiring some level of density notification. The combination of this and the increased knowledge of the risks posed by dense breast tissue have led the medical profession to implement significant changes in the practice of breast health. Many health systems have changed practice guidelines and protocols, purchased new technology, and retrained staff to respond to the new reality of patient awareness.

In order for patients to be informed participants in their own health surveillance, they need sufficient knowledge about their own bodies.

The infrastructure is already in place to support this notification and there is no defensible reason to deny patients this critical piece of information about their own health.

SUPPORT/OPPOSE

County of Santa Clara (sponsor)
Breast Cancer Prevention Partners
DenseBreast-info.org
Medical Imaging and Technology Alliance

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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¹ Population-Attributable Risk Proportion of Clinical Risk Factors for Breast Cancer. Natalie J. Engmann, MSc; Marzieh K. Golmakani, MS; Diana L. Miglioretti, PhD; et al