

Chairwoman Schmidt and members of the Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee,

My name is Theresa Meyer. I live up in Washington County Kansas, outside the small community of Palmer, Kansas. My family and I first began learning the foreign language of Breast Cancer in October of 1998 when I was diagnosed with Stage I Breast Cancer. My cancer was ER- and PR- and at that particular time, HER2neu was just beginning to be tested but not on a regular basis, of which mine was not tested. I still had two children at home; our middle son was a junior in high school and our youngest daughter was in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade; our oldest Travis had graduated from high school. My cancer was very aggressive and the first Oncologist wasn't for sure if chemotherapy would help or not, so he requested I get a second opinion. We received the second opinion at KU Med with a Breast Cancer Oncologist, Dr. Carol Fabian. She too didn't know if Chemotherapy would help or not. It was totally left up to me and my husband what we would do. We opted to have the modified Radical Mastectomy and would be followed closely for the next several years.

Nine years later all our children had graduated from high school. This is when I decided to try and achieve my lifelong dream of becoming a Hospice nurse. I began taking pre-nursing classes and began my LPN class in August of 2010. In March I was accepted into the RN program. I accepted the position and a month later our daughter called and informed us she was engaged to get married, and that they had set their wedding date 7 months later in November. Well, I couldn't miss out on planning our daughter's wedding, so I bowed out of the RN program. My Dad at this same time opted to quit taking his medication that he was on for a terminal lung disease, knowing he wouldn't be able to make it to Emily's wedding. I moved out to take care of my Dad until he passed away; my dream of being a Hospice nurse came true with my Dad.

The wedding was over, and I needed to decide what I could do with my LPN degree. Whatever it was, I knew I wanted to volunteer and help people out. This is when I read about Red Cross Disaster Services. This would be the perfect fit. I went first class and then took all the necessary classes to become qualified to do Disaster Nursing. My first disaster was in August of 2012, was Hurricane Matthew down in Florida. The next disaster I helped out with was Hurricane Sandy in October of 2012 up in New Jersey. I was on the ground within 2 days of Super Storm Sandy hitting. I worked two weeks and then came home for a couple of weeks, going back the first two weeks of December 2012 and working the Far Rock a Ways. The following disaster I volunteered for was in April of 2013 the fertilizer explosion in West, Texas that destroyed an entire Nursing Home, and killed several firemen and 1<sup>st</sup> responders. The last disaster I volunteered for was in Moore, Oklahoma in May of 2013. This is one where the two storm watchers were killed and several other people died do to the tornado and flood waters. These disasters most of us would put in 12-14 hours on most days. I absolutely loved volunteering for the American Red Cross; so many people needed someone to tell them everything would be OK during these trying times.

The next disaster happened in September of 2013. This disaster was a family disaster. I had found a lump on my mastectomy side. I went to my family physician that sent me on to a surgeon. Within a few days we were diagnosed with Stage IV Breast Cancer. The language we had learned 15 years earlier now

had a different dialect. They were telling us that our cancer was back but this time it was Stage IV, also known as terminal cancer. Dr. Fabian said that treatments has come a long way, and that hopefully with chemotherapy, radiation, my Stage IV Breast Cancer would be like a chronic disease. Dr. Fabian uses a team approach to manage my cancer and my symptoms, where I met with a nutritionist, psychologist, and cardiologist. We had treatments every three weeks, driving 360 miles round trip. I received Taxotere, Herceptin, and Perjeta. I got an infection of some sort after the 3<sup>rd</sup> treatment and we postponed my next treatment for 3 weeks. Dr. Fabian put me on Antibiotics but also wanted me to begin taking a daily oral medication of Aromasin which is an Aromatase Inhibitor to help block any estrogen my body may be making. I started my chemotherapy treatments in October 2013 and finished up in March of 2014. I then moved to the American Cancer Society Hope Lodge in Kansas City Missouri and had 25 radiation treatments. I lived at Hope Lodge and drove myself to and from treatments with Dr. Mitchell a Radiation Oncologist. April 9<sup>th</sup> was my last radiation treatment. I continued to receive maintenance treatments traveling 360 miles every three weeks until Dr. Fabian announced her retirement giving me 3 months notice.

I was forced to seek out a new Oncologist since no one replaced Dr. Fabian. I began seeing an Oncologist in Manhattan, Kansas. I continue to get maintenance treatment every three weeks. The Oncologist in Manhattan is a general Oncologist and they do not use the team approach. When I started seeing this new Oncologist, I was taking up to 20+ pills a day. I had lost 35 pounds and my appetite was nil. My new Oncologist wanted me to take another pill to help me gain weight, I refused. When I had a sore throat, he wanted to send me to an ENT. When I had a stomach ache, he wanted me to go to a Gastroenterologist. My feet and hands have horrible neuropathy; he wanted me to see a Neurologist. At times I was taking up to 20+ pills a day. I was taking pain pills on a regular basis. My quality of life was poor. I wanted to be able to enjoy life. I wanted to be able to clean my house, to do my laundry, to enjoy seeing family but I was so tired all the time and had no energy. I want so much more for my life. I want to volunteer for the American Red Cross again. I want to be able to help out others when I see their need. I finally requested to be referred to a Palliative Care doctor. My Oncologist said there were none in Manhattan. He said the closest thing in Manhattan was Hospice. I told him I wasn't quite ready for that.

**There are so many of us in rural Kansas that seek the best care we can get, but if there is no Palliative care around for us, what are we to do? My quality of life matters! Every one of the people I sit with in the treatment room, their quality of lives matter. Please support HB 2031 not just for me; please support HB 2031 for all of us. Our quality of lives should matter!!**

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