

NBCC

NATIONAL BREAST CANCER COALITION

grassroots advocacy in action

March 22, 2001

The Honorable John Dingell
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Dingell:

On behalf of the National Breast Cancer Coalition (NBCC) and the 2.6 million women living with breast cancer, I am writing to endorse the **Bipartisan Patient Protection Act of 2001 (S. 283/H.R. 526)**. This legislation embodies many of the important patient protections that NBCC has supported in its legislative priorities.

The National Breast Cancer Coalition is a grassroots advocacy organization made up of more than 500 member organizations and 60,000 individual members dedicated to the eradication of breast cancer through advocacy and action. The Coalition has long been committed to working with Members of Congress to enact meaningful healthcare reform. While many versions of "patient protection" legislation have been discussed in the past, we appreciate your leadership on introducing bipartisan legislation that brings us one step closer to achieving our goal.

Many features of S. 283/H.R. 526 are particularly important to breast cancer patients. For instance, NBCC appreciates the Bipartisan Patient Protection Act's requirement that health plans cover routine patient care costs for cancer patients enrolled in clinical trials approved by the National Institutes of Health, the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Department of Defense and the Food and Drug Administration. The Coalition believes that this would help increase patient participation in those trials.

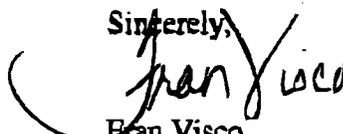
Clinical trials provide the best evidence of whether an intervention will work. Without clinical trials, we will never know how to prevent breast cancer, how best to treat it or how to cure it – and our demands for "quality care" will have no meaning. Not only will support for clinical trials improve the quality of health care for all patients, but it will also reduce healthcare costs since we will better understand what works and what doesn't when it comes to treating breast cancer and other diseases. It is unconscionable that health plans would deny payment for even routine patient care costs like physician and hospital charges merely because patients are receiving treatment in the context of a clinical trial versus standard therapy.

NBCC also supports the Bipartisan Patient Protection Act's inclusion of an access to specialty care provision, which is extremely important to breast cancer patients, and is an essential component of a meaningful patients' bill of rights. NBCC is pleased that this legislation would allow breast cancer patients to go straight to their oncologists should that be medically appropriate.

Finally, NBCC would like to thank you for your hard work and bipartisanship in putting together a bill that seeks to address the concerns raised by some opponents of the liability provisions in the Norwood-Dingell bill, while at the same time seeks to maintain meaningful enforcement mechanisms. The Coalition believes that true accountability is an essential component of meaningful managed care reform. As you know, NBCC believes that accountability is the ultimate deterrent and an essential last resort when all else fails. Only legal accountability gives injured patients what they need to ensure that managed care does the right thing before it is too late.

The Coalition looks forward to working with you to ensure that a meaningful and enforceable patients' bill of rights is enacted this year. Thank you again for the incredible leadership you have shown on this issue. Please do not hesitate to call me or NBCC's Deputy Director of Government Relations, Jennifer Katz at (202) 973-0595 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Brian Visco
President