

United States House of Representatives Congresswoman Debbie Wasserman Schultz



**Press Release**

**Breast Cancer and Younger Women: EARLY is the Key**

*Rep. Wasserman Schultz and Sen. Klobuchar introduce the Education and Awareness Requires Learning Young Act - or "the EARLY Act"*

March 23, 2009

(Washington, DC) -- At a press conference in the Capitol building, Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz (FL-20) was joined by Sen. Amy Klobuchar (MN), to announce legislation they will introduce to highlight the breast cancer risks facing young women under the age of 40 to empower these women with the tools they need to prevent and fight this deadly disease. They were joined by Rep. Melissa Bean (IL-8) as well as local cancer survivor Maimah Karmo, Executive Director of the Tigerlily Foundation, and Dr. Sandra Swain the medical director of the Cancer Institute at Washington Hospital Center. The introduction of the legislation followed the announcement this past weekend by Rep. Wasserman Schultz that she successfully battled breast cancer last year after finding a lump during a routine self-examination.

"I found my cancer early because of knowledge and awareness," said Rep. Wasserman Schultz. "I knew that I should perform breast self-exams, and I was aware of what my body was supposed to feel like. We need to ensure that every young woman in America can rely on more than luck because their survival depends on it."

The Education and Awareness Requires Learning Young Act (EARLY Act) directs the Centers for Disease Control to develop and implement a national education campaign to increase awareness of the threats posed by breast cancer in young women of all ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and the particular heightened risks faced by certain groups. The campaign will help young women and providers identify the specific threats and warning signs of breast cancer that lead to early diagnoses, and prevention efforts women can undertake to reduce their risks.

"Debbie's courage and strength is an inspiration to us all," said Sen. Klobuchar. "Breast cancer is a leading cause of death for women. We need to make sure that women, especially young women, have access to the best information and the best support possible to protect themselves against this killer.

Because young women diagnosed with breast and ovarian cancer face unique challenges related to their fertility and social life, the legislation provides assistance to organizations to support young women diagnosed with breast cancer and help them get the assistance they need, including social and psychological support, fertility counseling and recurrence prevention training"

"We need to do a better job reaching young women who are at particular risk of breast cancer, and giving those who are diagnosed the tools to deal with the disease and its impact on their lives," said Rep. Sue Myrick (NC-9), the Republican co-sponsor of the

House legislation. “Breast cancer is often more aggressive in younger women, and it’s critical that doctors and patients know what to look for. When I was diagnosed with breast cancer, I was fortunate to have caught it early. I’m hopeful that, with the help of this kind of awareness effort, more women will have the same opportunity.”

Breast cancer is the leading cause of cancer deaths in young women under the age of 40. Each year more than 10,000 young women are diagnosed with breast cancer and for more than 1,000 of these women, the disease is fatal. However, many younger women mistakenly think that breast cancer is just something that happens to older women. Diagnoses are delayed because younger women and health providers alike may lack the knowledge to be more proactive in the fight against this disease and because breast cancer in younger women is often more aggressive, delays can have serious and deadly consequences.

“It’s important for all woman to educate themselves about breast cancer, and for younger women to determine their exact risks,” said Dr. Swain, “Younger women with a family history of breast cancer or Ashkenazi Jewish heritage should discuss the pros and cons of genetic testing and potential screening options with their doctors.”

“It is critical that we support the EARLY Act and get this legislation passed,” said Ms. Karmo. “There are over a quarter million women living in the United States today who are diagnosed with breast cancer under 40. These women are not just statistics, they’re heart beats. They need education, they need to be aware, and they need hands on support.”

“We don’t want to alarm people, but we can and we must reduce the number of young women dying from breast cancer. We can do that by passing this legislation and educating young women and providers of the risks,” said Rep. Wasserman Schultz.

###