

In support of SB 1137

Autologous Reconstruction Testimony:

Due to my lived experience as a breast cancer survivor, I am in support of SB 1137.

I was lucky enough to have a DCIS which meant I was in somewhat less immediate risk but as a trade off, my next steps were less prescribed and were often based on potential risk in the future...

Under these circumstances I quickly realized that I was faced with many impossible decisions - and that all of the options waiting at the other end of my choices are really really awful.

Once I had made it far enough through the maze of decisions that I realized my person best awful option was mastectomy and reconstruction, I was appalled at what I was presented as my options for reconstruction - almost no one mentioned autologous reconstruction as an option and reconstruction with implants had so many drawbacks that I decided I would rather go flat which I seriously considered.

After more research I found a surgeon in my area who was able to DIEP an autologous reconstruction procedure. I was told he might not choose me if my body composition wasn't just right.

After meeting with him and doing a CT scan it was decided that I could move forward with the surgery. Though there were many things about this decision that, while it seems the best of many bad options, that were quite scary:

- I was quoted an up to 16 hour surgery time
- Several days afterwards in the ICU
- 3-4 months until I could return to work
- No ability to "save the nipples"

I was super worried about the long surgery time due to concerns about blood clotting and just general recovery from being under anesthesia that long.

I had decided that while this seemed like a horrifying experience in the short run, it would result in less long term suffering and I braced myself to endure this.

That was until I spoke with somebody who had gone to the Center for Restorative Breast Surgery in New Orleans.

At first I didn't believe what she was telling me in regard to how much better the experience there could be. Including:

- 6-8 hour surgery time
- Nurses and doctors who only worked on breast reconstruction (no ICU)
- 4-6 weeks of recovery time
- Nipple sparing

While I knew that I would incur out of pocket costs if I did this, in the long run it seemed worth trying to make it possible. I tried for an exception from my insurance it was denied because on paper, someone in my area offered the same procedure, but in reality the difference in the time and recovery for these two options was night in day.

So I canceled my local appointment and scheduled with The Center in NOLA. I'm super thankful I made that decision and so happy with the outcome. It was the first Time in the whole journey that I had an option that was not completely awful and that gave me hope and some positive light.

I was lucky to be able to set up a GoFundMe and pay through The Centers program for patients who had to come out of network.

But many women are not so lucky and the arduous process of navigating costs and options adds so much stress to an already sad and emotional experience.

I hope you will consider helping women in these situations by passing SB 1137.

Best,

Lea Harmon

