

March 7, 2024

Dear Chair Klein and Committee Members:

I am writing in support of SF4423. Cancer is part of my life both personally and professionally, and I want to thank Senator Dziedzic for carrying this legislation.

I've been impacted as a caregiver for my mother who completed her cancer treatment several years ago and will be celebrating 15 years cancer-free on Thanksgiving this year. As many of you may know, you are changed the day you hear those words "you have cancer". In that moment, you are imagining all the ways in which your life will change. Imagine if we could reduce the impact of one of those changes, to reduce stress and anxiety, to **help patients feel just a bit of normalcy throughout their cancer journey that has turned their lives upside down.**

That is what a wig did not only for my mother, but for those around her. My mother worked in a very public facing job as an elementary school secretary. Day in and day out, she was in front of these tiny humans and she couldn't imagine the conversations she'd have to have with the students and the impact it might have on them when she presented with her bald head. It was important to her to look as much like herself as possible- and that only would have been possible with a wig, as she quickly lost her hair once she started her chemotherapy. I also got married in the midst of my mother's treatment. In her true, selfless form, her concern was about not taking the attention away from me with how she looked and it was important for her to look back on pictures and see a joyous day, not her cancer. While my mother's focus was on limiting the affect on those around her, having a wig that very much looked like her usual hairstyle also helped my mom cope with the countless other ways in which her body had changed. **While the scars were still healing, she could at least see herself in the mirror and feel and look like herself, if just for a moment.**

**As an oncology social worker, I've also seen countless times the impact a wig can have on a patient's well-being and the challenges that come when patients come to understand the cost of a wig.**

Financial toxicity is prevalent for so many of our patients and when patients are faced between paying their utility bills and buying a wig, you can imagine that it's the lights that stay on and food that gets put on the table. Hair is such an important part of a person's identity and to lose it is to lose part of who you are. The difference I have seen between a patient who comes in bald after losing all their hair and after they've received their wig through the support of the American Cancer Society is remarkable. They appear lighter and brighter and more engaged- more like themselves.

All patients experiencing hair loss because of their cancer treatment should have the opportunity to feel a bit of normalcy, to feel a bit more like themselves. Thank you for your time and consideration of this important, life-changing legislation.

Sincerely,

Caitlyn Squire, MSW, LICSW

Manager of Patient Support and Education, HealthPartners Cancer Care System.