

Testimony of Sheryl Crow
Singer-songwriter and Breast Cancer Advocate
before the Health Subcommittee of the
House Energy and Commerce Committee
May 21, 2008

Thank you Chairman Pallone, Ranking Member Deal and Members of this Subcommittee for holding this hearing. I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today on the Breast Cancer and Environmental Research Act. This bill is responsible public policy calling for research to move us closer to understanding the causes of breast cancer and how to prevent it. As a breast cancer survivor and advocate I am very passionate about getting this bill enacted this year.

In 2006, I was diagnosed with breast cancer. I knew I wasn't going to sit back and let breast cancer control my life. Before my diagnosis, I had been helping raise awareness and funds for breast cancer for years. Concerts, events, whatever I could do because I always knew it was an important issue. Then it really hit home. And I knew awareness wasn't enough, real, strategic action was needed, so I joined with Fran Visco and the National Breast Cancer Coalition (NBCC) because I believe in what they are doing for all of us.

About a year ago, Fran asked me to learn about this bill and I did. I am not here lightly. I know what this bill will do and I am certain it is the right approach.

Why is this bill so important to me? Because I want to know what causes this disease – for me, for the 2.3 million others who share this diagnosis with me, and especially for all those who are at risk, or putting themselves at risk without even knowing it. Like the vast majority of women

diagnosed with breast cancer, I have no known risk factor, including no family history. I have no idea why I got breast cancer, or what I can say to others who want to prevent it. Here's what I do know: we need to put more resources into figuring out what the environment has to do with breast cancer. We need to do that through government funding, because there is little financial incentive for anyone else to do this research.

I have spent a great deal of time working on environmental issues. I have traveled the country to raise awareness about what we are doing to our environment and what we can do to help save it. I know the issues are even more complex than that, especially when it comes to the associations between environment and disease. And I know this bill – and NBCC – includes a broad definition of environment, to include not just exposures, but lifestyle and the interaction between genes and the environment in and outside of our bodies. Looking at these issues in such a strategic, global way needs federal funding and oversight. But it also needs the input of researchers and advocates throughout the country and from every perspective.

I can tell you this: the public cares deeply about the environment and about breast cancer. And they look to you to help solve these problems. Don't let us down.

Breast cancer continues to be a puzzle. Rather than just continuing to invent new treatments, I believe we need to focus on prevention. And we are unlikely to prevent breast cancer if we do not know what causes it. The Breast Cancer and Environmental Research Act calls for a national, strategic approach to address the question of what in our environment – inside and outside our bodies - may be related to breast cancer. It doesn't dictate the science. It doesn't tell

scientists what to do. But it does give them the resources and the focus to address these issues. It will bring the best and brightest researchers together to work in collaboration with trained advocates and with community-based organizations. So, the scientists across the country, working with the community most at risk and impacted by this disease, working together to solve the problem seems like a great way to deal with such a difficult issue. It is a wise investment that our federal government must make. It is a small investment relative to the size of this problem that affects millions of Americans.

It is frustrating to me that this bill has been around for so long, with so much support, and it still has not been enacted. I know that this bill was developed after years of analysis by the National Breast Cancer Coalition, with the input of scientists, policymakers, consumers, and all the key stakeholders. It was developed after much thought and based on experience with different research models.

I can't imagine there are many bills with the level of bipartisan support this bill has. Advocates like me worked very hard to get 268 cosponsors here in the House, and 70 in the Senate. As a member of the public I must assume each and every one of those cosponsors supports the approach taken by this bill. And I have heard about the tremendous support from the scientific community. So, scientists support this, the public supports it, and the majority of both the House and Senate support it. A majority of this very Committee supports it. My understanding is that after negotiations and discussions with the National Breast Cancer Coalition, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) does not oppose the Senate version of this bill. Those facts alone should support enactment.

Last April, I was up here on Capitol Hill with Fran and the National Breast Cancer Coalition, meeting with a number of you, and with Members of the Senate, to talk about this bill. Frankly, I thought after all the support, after all the promises I got last Spring, after eight years of Congress supporting this bill, by now it would be law. Yet, here we are.

It's time.

I am so glad you are holding this hearing today. I understand it is a necessary step before your Committee can actually approve the bill. And I hope that will happen very soon, perhaps today? I urge you to take action on this legislation -- the time is long overdue. All across the country, women and their families are demanding that Congress act now to pass the Breast Cancer and Environmental Research Act.

We are looking to you for your leadership and your support.