

Senator Lincoln Chafee  
Testimony before the Public Health Subcommittee  
Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee  
S. 830 - The Breast Cancer and Environmental Research Act of 2001

April 25, 2002

Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to submit this testimony on behalf of S. 830, the Breast Cancer and Environmental Research Act. I am pleased that your Committee is considering this important legislation, which will establish research centers that would be the first in the nation to specifically study the environmental factors that may be related to the development of breast cancer.

According to the National Breast Cancer Coalition, an estimated 233,000 women in the United States will be diagnosed with breast cancer this year, and 40,000 women will die of this terrible disease. We owe it to these women who are diagnosed with this life-threatening disease to provide them with answers for the first time.

It is generally believed that the environment plays some role in the development of breast cancer, but the extent of that role is not understood. S. 830 will enable scientists to conduct more conclusive and comprehensive research to determine the impact of the environment on breast cancer. While more research is being conducted into the relationship between breast cancer and the environment, there are still several issues that must be resolved to make this research more effective.

- There is no known cause of breast cancer. There is little agreement in the scientific community on how the environment affects breast cancer. While studies have been conducted on the links between environmental factors like pesticides, an individual's diet, and electromagnetic fields, no consensus has been reached. There are other factors that have not yet been studied that could provide valuable information. While there is much speculation, it is clear that the relationship between environmental exposures and breast cancer is not well understood.
- There are challenges in conducting environmental research. Identifying links between environmental factors and breast cancer is difficult. Laboratory experiments and cluster analyses, such as those in Long Island, New York, cannot reveal whether an environmental exposure increases a woman's risk of breast cancer. Epidemiological studies must be carefully designed because environmental exposures are difficult to measure.
- Coordination between the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the National Cancer Institute (NCI), and the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) needs to occur. NCI and NIEHS are the two institutes within the NIH that fund most of the research related to breast cancer and the environment; however, comprehensive information specific to

environmental effects on breast cancer is not currently available.

S. 830 will establish eight research centers to study these potential links. These "Breast Cancer Environmental Research Centers" would provide for multi-disciplinary research among basic, clinical, epidemiological and behavioral scientists interested in establishing outstanding, state-of-the-art research programs addressing potential links between the environment and breast cancer. The NIEHS would award grants based on a competitive peer-review process. This legislation would require each Center to collaborate with community organizations, including those that represent women with breast cancer. S. 830 authorizes \$30 million each year over the next five years for these grants.

Many scientists believe that certain groups of women have genetic variations that may make them more susceptible to adverse environmental exposures. We need to step back and gather evidence before we come to conclusions -- that is the purpose of this bill. People are hungry for information, and there is a lot of inconclusive data, some of which has no scientific merit whatsoever. We have the opportunity through this legislation to gather legitimate and comprehensive data from premier research institutions across the nation.

Finally, I would like to point out that S. 830 has an impressive list of 30 bipartisan cosponsors, and is the product of a very carefully crafted compromise negotiated between the Senate and House sponsors, the National Breast Cancer Coalition, and the National Institutes of Health. While one could argue that no product is perfect, a lot of thought went into the crafting of this legislation to ensure that all affected parties would be pleased with the outcome. At times, it was not an easy feat to produce a bill that the advocates and the Institute would both find acceptable, but we managed to achieve this goal after several meetings. I am happy to say that S. 830 is the product of these successful negotiations.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I appreciate this opportunity to present this testimony on behalf of this important legislation, and I look forward to working with you in the future to ensure its passage in the Senate.