

Gail Carey
Breast Cancer Survivor Screening and Treatment Recipient,
The Healthy Women's Partnership, New York's version of
the National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program (NBCCEDP)

Before

The Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
United States House of Representatives
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Room 2154, Rayburn House Office Building

Good morning, Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the Committee. I am Gail Carey, a 5-year breast cancer survivor from Long Island, New York. I appreciate the opportunity to discuss a critical program that I credit with saving my life, the National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program.

As one of nine children, I learned at a young age the importance of helping out around the house, especially since both of my parents worked. When my mother developed emphysema and had to stop working, my family struggled financially. My parents later separated, forcing my mother and my siblings to turn to Medicaid for health coverage.

My mother always reminded us that Medicaid was a temporary remedy, not a permanent solution. After my mom passed away, I was inspired to find a good job that would give me health benefits. I was fortunate to find a position with an advertising and trade show company in New York.

After the attacks of 9/11, the New York trade show market collapsed and I along with 90 percent of my co-workers lost our jobs. Losing a job also meant losing my insurance benefits. I had separated from my husband the year before the attacks, so I had

no one to rely on for assistance. A few weeks after losing my job, I found what felt like a lump in my breast.

Having had previous experience in the mammography division of a health care facility I knew how important it was to get the lump checked out quickly. But financially, I couldn't afford to pay for a screening. After a couple months of job hunting, I was hired by a company that promised health insurance after three months. I waited the required three months before asking my boss about health benefits. I indicated that I had a health concern that needed to be addressed immediately, so getting my insurance was critical. Instead of receiving the benefits I was promised, I was fired.

It had been five months since I first found a suspicious lump in my breast, and I was still uninsured. Five months could be the difference between life and death, so I was really playing with a loaded gun. Fortunately, a friend of mine told me about a program, "The Healthy Women's Partnership," New York's version of the National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program (NBCCEDP) that provides low-income, uninsured women with free or low-cost breast and cervical cancer screenings. The program, administered by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), was created to assist medically underserved women like myself in getting screened for cancer.

I became involved with Maureen Massellaro, a patient navigator from the American Cancer Society who helped me get the screening process underway. Doctors confirmed the lump in my breast was in fact cancerous. My surgeon, Dr. Capizzi, performed a partial mastectomy, but he feared that the cancer had not been entirely removed, so he performed a follow-up full mastectomy. All of the follow-up treatment,

including medications, was covered by Medicaid, thanks to the Breast and Cervical Cancer Prevention and Treatment Act.

I feel blessed to have found this NBCCEDP program that covered my screening and ensured I would have access to treatment. Without them, I likely would not have survived. Throughout this whole ordeal, I was treated with such dignity. This program is a phenomenon. I thought I was going to die because I didn't have coverage, and nobody should have that as their only option.

The impact of this program is more extensive than you may think, since it impacted not just my well-being, but also the lives of my children, family and friends. Since my treatment, I have been around to see my oldest daughter marry and just recently became a first-time grandmother. I hope you will continue to support and strengthen this program because for women like me, it can be the difference between life and death.