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November 23, 2009

The Honorable Kathleen G. Sebelius  
Secretary  
United States Department of Health and Human Services  
200 Independence Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Sebelius:

I am writing to join in strong opposition to the recent U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) recommendations against screening mammography in women 40 to 49 years of age. The USPSTF report also discouraged clinicians from teaching women how to perform breast self-examination.

The new guidelines – that women wait until age 50 to start having routine mammograms, and that no benefit has been shown for clinical breast examination or breast self-examination – conflict with expert advice in the medical and cancer prevention advocacy communities.

In fact, numerous organizations have forcefully spoken out against the Task Force recommendations and on behalf of continuing to promote early detection and mammography. These organizations included the American Cancer Society, Susan G. Komen for the Cure, Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield of New Jersey, the American Medical Association (AMA), the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG), the American College of Radiology (ACR) and the Society of Breast Imaging (SBI).

Most disappointing about the USPSTF conclusions is the fact that they come on the heels of a Fall 2009 report published by the American Cancer Society indicating a large decline in the breast cancer deaths in women under 50 years of age. Researchers attribute these declines to early detection through mammography along with improved treatments.

Additionally, many local New Jersey cancer advocacy groups and New Jersey medical professionals have told me that the new federal guidelines have undermined their hard work over the years to educate women on the importance of receiving annual mammogram to detect cancer early and help save lives.

Breast Cancer continues to be the most common cancer in women. And while I applaud your recent public statements concerning the USPSTF recommendations, I ask that you work

with like-minded members of Congress toward promoting a federal health care policy of encouraging, not discouraging, mammography screening and self-examination for women 40 to 49 years of age.

Best personal wishes.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Leonard Lance". The signature is written in black ink on a white background.

Leonard Lance  
Member of Congress