Senator Beverly Hammerstrom

November 13, 2006

Senator Beverly Hammerstrom
P.O. Box 30036
Lansing MI. 48909-7536

Re: SB: 1416

Dear Senator Hammerstrom,

I am a 64 year old retired social work administrator with extensive professional experience in the areas of, family counseling, child welfare and children's mental health. In 2001 I was diagnosed with Stage II B cervical cancer, despite a negative Pap test two and a half years previously.

Thus began five years of progressively more invasive surgery. After unsuccessful local treatment, I was referred to the University of Michigan Cancer Center where a radical hysterectomy was aborted when it was determined that the cancer had spread to an ovary, fallopian tube and a lymph node. Aggressive internal and external radiation and chemotherapy was initiated. The treatment was taxing but nothing compared to the subsequent side effects which posed incredible challenges including ongoing severe pain, nausea, infections and incontinence. I have had CT scans too numerable to remember and more colonoscopies in one year than most people have in a lifetime. Ultimately, radiation caused blockages and strictures made surgeries necessary for the removal of a significant portion of my small bowel and creation of a permanent colostomy.

And the beat goes on! A recent CT scan indicates a potential thinning of the bone in my spine and I am scheduled for further evaluation. I am told that the radiation damage is unpredictable and may reoccur at any time. Because of the condition of the intestines each additional surgery becomes riskier and less likely to succeed. Tube feeding is a real possibility if additional bowel surgery is necessary and treatment options are running out.

In the meantime the financial, emotional and professional impact has been significant. My insurance (State of Michigan Blue Cross/Blue Shield) has paid more than a quarter of a million dollars for my treatment. During 2005 alone, I traveled more than 2500 miles for medical treatment. My family also has traveled thousands of miles to provide advocacy, assistance and support. I have had to retire from my position as an executive director of a program for domestic and sexual violence and homelessness. I have cancelled hundreds of professional and social commitments because my health is so unpredictable and my energy level is compromised.

I strongly support SB 1416 to make the vaccination against HPV mandatory for sixth grade girls to insure that women and families do not experience similar life changing illness. As I made the difficult but inevitable decision to proceed with the colostomy my surgeon said, "I know this is not what you planned when you were a little girl". I strongly believe this legislation will help the little girls of Michigan to plan for healthy and productive lives that are not limited by the ravages of cervical cancer.

Sincerely,
Mary Patterson ACSW