

# Early Detection Saves Lives Coalition: Radiologist speaks to cost-savings bipartisan bill can bring patients and healthcare systems

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[La Crosse, Wis.] – Radiologist and breast cancer specialist Dr. Taj Kattapuram authored an opinion column in the *La Crosse Tribune* advocating for action on Senate Bill 121, which increases access to life-saving breast imaging for those with dense breast tissue and those at increased risk of breast cancer. The bipartisan bill, co-sponsored by over one-third of the Legislature and backed by leading health organizations across the state, is authored by Sen. Rachael Cabral-Guevara (R-Appleton) and Rep. Nate Gustafson (R-Neenah).

Supplemental and diagnostic breast imaging is often cost-prohibitive for many patients. By delaying these additional examinations, patients risk allowing cancers to grow and spread, making the bill critical to saving lives. Dr. Kattapuram writes:

**“Unfortunately, necessary supplemental screenings or diagnostic evaluations can range from [\\$234 to over \\$1,000](#) in out-of-pocket costs, imposing a major financial barrier. I have seen cases where patients, especially those facing budgetary constraints, either delayed or entirely skipped imaging care due to costs. For these individuals, delayed imaging evaluations risk cancer growth and spread, making future treatment options more limited and more expensive. The human toll of delayed diagnoses is immeasurable, and lives are unnecessarily lost.”**

In addition to saving patients money, SB 121 reduces financial strain on the healthcare system in the long-run by increasing rates of early breast cancer

detection. Dr. Kattapuram writes, **“The upfront investment in early detection programs pays off exponentially in the long run by reducing the financial burden of prolonged treatments for both the patient and healthcare systems. The cost-effectiveness of early detection is also evident in shorter hospital stays, less aggressive interventions, and a lower demand for chemotherapy or surgeries.”**

Read the full piece [here](#) or below:

### **Dr. Taj Kattapuram: No-cost breast cancer screenings for at-risk women a no-brainer**

[La Crosse Tribune](#)

Dr. Taj Kattapuram

December 16, 2023

As a radiologist with years of experience in breast imaging and imaging-guided intervention, I have witnessed both the triumphs of early breast cancer detection and the heart-wrenching consequences of delayed diagnoses. It is with this firsthand experience that I passionately advocate for Senate Bill 121, a bipartisan bill that provides no-cost access to additional breast cancer screenings for those with dense breast tissue and those at increased risk of the disease. This bill provides a crucial step in saving lives and reducing the long-term financial burden on both individuals and the healthcare system.

The road to recovery for breast cancer patients is often a steep hill to climb, and the emotional and financial tolls accumulate quickly. In rural Wisconsin, people must be cautious with how they spend their money, making early detection essential in the battle against this disease. When breast cancer is detected early, patients have a [99% chance of survival versus a 30% chance](#) after cancer has metastasized. I've witnessed patients whose lives take a dramatically different course due to the timely discovery of breast cancer compared to those with delayed diagnosis.

Currently, health insurance policies cover annual screening mammograms without patient cost-sharing for women ages 50 and up, as well as two mammograms for those between ages 45 and 49 who meet certain criteria. However, these mammograms are not a catch-all, so those who need additional evaluation or

adjunctive screening are left surprised to learn there is a cost to care. For example, the [40% of women](#) with dense breast tissue are [four-to-six times](#) more likely to develop breast cancer and their breast density can make detecting cancer on a standard mammogram especially difficult.

Unfortunately, necessary supplemental screenings or diagnostic evaluations can range from [\\$234 to over \\$1,000](#) in out-of-pocket costs, imposing a major financial barrier. I have seen cases where patients, especially those facing budgetary constraints, either delayed or entirely skipped imaging care due to costs. For these individuals, delayed imaging evaluations risk cancer growth and spread, making future treatment options more limited and more expensive. The human toll of delayed diagnoses is immeasurable, and lives are unnecessarily lost.

Beyond the impact on human lives, there is a compelling economic argument for SB 121. The upfront investment in early detection programs pays off exponentially in the long run by reducing the financial burden of prolonged treatments for both the patient and healthcare systems. The cost-effectiveness of early detection is also evident in shorter hospital stays, less aggressive interventions, and a lower demand for chemotherapy or surgeries. For instance, a [study published](#) in the Journal of the National Cancer Institute found that the cost of treating breast cancer increases significantly with the stage at which it is diagnosed.

The World Health Organization also reports that an early diagnosis can cost [two-to-four times less](#) to treat than a late-stage diagnosis, which often requires more aggressive treatments and extended hospital stays. No-cost screenings can substantially reduce the overall economic impact of breast cancer on both individuals and the healthcare system.

Additionally, the emotional toll on patients and their families, when faced with the financial strain of prolonged and intensive treatments, is immeasurable. SB 121 will not only save lives but also shield families from the devastating economic consequences of a cancer diagnosis.

SB 121 is not merely a matter of healthcare policy; it is a matter of life and death. As a radiologist, I have seen the transformative power of early detection. This bill will save lives and reduce the cost burden on families and our healthcare system. With that, I encourage our state legislators and all Wisconsinites to support this bill.

*Dr. Taj Kattapuram is a radiologist and breast cancer specialist in La Crosse.*