

March 18, 2013

Dear Members of the Senate Health Care Committee,

My name is Katie Jeremiah and I live in Portland, Oregon. Although I usually default to supporting views of limited government, strong individual liberty, and personal responsibility, today I come to you in support of House Bill 2896, which would function to prohibit children and teens from access to UV tanning devices.

I was diagnosed with malignant melanoma shortly before I turned 27. I was on a break from law school when my mom noticed a small dark mark on my lower back. By a string of luck, I already had a routine appointment scheduled with a dermatologist the following week. At that appointment, I requested that the physician's assistant take a look at the mark. He immediately excised the mark without any comment, and I thought that was the end.

Unfortunately, I was wrong. I received a call from the dermatologist just a few days after my appointment.

"Ms. Jeremiah, we would like your consent to send your labs to Oregon Health Science University for further testing," he said.

That phone call turned in to what seemed like an eternity of waiting to discover whether I, too, was a victim of the "C" word. Then the dreaded call came:

"Ms. Jeremiah, the test results have confirmed that you have malignant melanoma. We need you to come in to our office as soon as possible for further testing.

That call was followed by another appointment where more skin was removed and tested to ensure that the cancer was completely gone. Ultimately, by the third visit to the dermatologist, I received confirmation that the cancer was completely removed without complication and did not require further treatment. The doctor credited early detection as the key to being able to continue on with my normal life, with the exception of follow-up screenings. I was one of the "lucky ones" who, by an accidental discovery of the mark on my back, was able to avoid facing the struggles of later stages of cancer.

In the six years since the diagnosis, every doctor that I have seen has been very interested in the fact that my patient history shows that I had malignant melanoma. They are struck by the fact that I am young and in great health, and doctors are used to seeing the diagnosis in older patients. In every instance, their first question is "did you use tanning beds as a teenager?"

As a teenager, being tan was a factor of being “cool,” especially in the weeks leading to prom season. As a high school junior, I wanted nothing more than to be tan for prom. Despite my badgering, my parents refused to provide the parental consent that was necessary to allow me to tan in a tanning booth. Unfortunately, I was somehow able to circumvent the system and without my parents’ knowledge or consent, I tanned for days and weeks in a row. It became an addiction. It felt warm, and I liked the way it made me look. This continued through the first year at Oregon State University, where it was a routine preparation for every “house dance” or other event. Unlimited tanning deals were on every street corner.

Although I believe that it is not the legislature’s role to be overprotective or to unduly interfere with personal choice, this is a bill that is designed to protect *children* and teenagers from the hazards of tanning.

Please pass this bill as a good first step in reducing skin cancer rates, lowering healthcare costs, and saving lives—like car seats, alcohol and tobacco regulation.