

March 18, 2013

Dear Members of the Senate Health Care Committee,

My name is Blair Oman. I am 30 years old, a stage 3a melanoma survivor, and firm supporter of House Bill 2896. I would have liked to come testify in person, but I am 31 weeks pregnant and cannot travel to Salem at the moment. However, I would like to share my survival story.

Melanoma is the most dangerous type of skin cancer. It is the leading cause of death from skin disease.

How did I get it? I don't know for sure. Mine is not genetic, so my doctors and I have concluded that tanning is likely to blame. I tanned religiously in high school, college, and even up until my skin cancer diagnoses in January 2012.

My tanning chapter began when I was around 15 years old, and I subsequently tanned for years in Astoria, Oregon. I wore a short cheerleading skirt to school every Friday and the parents of a close friend owned our local tanning salon. It was practically mandatory that I maintain an orangey glow. As a minor, I must have tanned 3-4 times per week. I always kept a heart shaped sticker on my hip – a method my friends and I used to compare our tans to our natural skin tone to make sure we never faded. Sometimes I would badly burn... but did it deter me? No way, everyone knows that a burn eventually turns into a golden glow! What I didn't realize was that just using a UV tanning bed before age 35, increased my chances of getting melanoma by 75%.



Eight faux-tanned teenagers off to prom in 2001. I am in the bright blue (center).

Fast-forward to adulthood...

My "primary lesion" was a red flag from the start. Shortly after turning 29, I developed a raised mole on the far right side of my abdomen. It was tender to the touch. When I decided to have it removed, it was mostly for cosmetic reasons. I was a little nervous because a college sorority sister (who I often tanned with) recently had an early-stage melanoma scare. So, I made an appointment with a dermatologist at OHSU in Portland.

To make a long story short, I was shocked to be diagnosed with Stage 3a malignant melanoma with secondary malignant neoplasm of axillary node (yes, this means it had spread to my lymph nodes). In the span of 6 months, I endured two major surgeries, a JP drain, nuclear medicine, brain MRI, and PET scan. Fortunately, my doctor was able to remove all of the cancer from my waist and my affected lymph nodes were removed. Now, I am being closely monitored by both my dermatologist & a team of oncologists with frequent skin checks, scans, and mole-mapping.



I have no doubt in my mind that I could have avoided this fate if tanning salons had been inaccessible to me as a teen. I strongly urge you to consider the thousands of unassuming teenagers who are currently heading down a similar path and lend your support to House Bill 2896.

Thank you,

Blair Oman