hlth.Minister@gov.bc.ca

**Email subject line: Call to Change Outdated Breast Screening Practices**

Dear Minister,

I am writing to you today about breast cancer screening practices in our province that are costing lives.

**Background**

On October 15, 2018, British Columbia became the first province to implement breast density notification. The government recognized that women were being put at risk of a delayed breast cancer diagnosis because they were not being given information about a breast cancer risk affecting them: dense breasts. Now women are learning if they are at increased risk and thus can be proactive.

**Issue: Women with dense breasts cannot easily access beneficial supplementary screening**

Although women in British Columbia are now told if they have dense breasts, some are unable to easily access beneficial additional screening in the form of screening ultrasound. For women with dense breasts, mammograms are less accurate. Dense breast tissue is white on a mammogram, as is cancer. This creates a masking effect. The accuracy of mammography declines as the density increases - up to 50% of the cancers present in the densest breasts may be missed. Cancer in women with dense breasts is often discovered when a woman feels a lump after a ‘normal’ mammogram. These are called interval cancers and they are frequently later stage. Women with dense breasts are more likely to need mastectomy and chemotherapy and their prognosis is impacted. Screening ultrasound can find many cancers in dense breasts that were missed by mammography. However, there are very few locations in British Columbia offering it.

**What the Government of British Columbia can do**

The government must ensure that screening ultrasound is accessible so that women in British Columbia who have dense breasts who wish to access ultrasound can do so in a timely manner.

Sincerely,

[Name]