Statement of Phil Stella, MD

Michigan Senate Insurance Committee
Hearing on SB 625

January 27, 2016

Chairman Hune, Vice Chair Brandenburg, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today in strong support of SB 625 on behalf of the Michigan Society of Hematology and Oncology (MSHO) and the American Society for Clinical Oncology (ASCO). I am Dr. Phil Stella, an oncologist from Ann Arbor Michigan, and the Chair of the ASCO Government Relations Committee.

Dedicated to promoting exemplary care for patients with cancer and/or blood disorders through advocacy, education and research, MSHO represents over 2,000 healthcare professionals in private practice, academic medical centers and hospital-based clinics throughout the state. With nearly 40,000 members, ASCO’s mission is conquering cancer though research, education, and promotion of the highest quality patient care.

SB 625 would help ensure that similar policies apply to patient cost-sharing for both traditional intravenous cancer drugs and oral cancer drugs. Forty states and the District of Columbia have enacted similar laws, and with your help Michigan can be the next state to take this important step.

Thanks to scientific breakthroughs, today medical oncologists have opportunities to treat cancer patients with oral and other self-administered anticancer medications rather than just with traditional intravenous (IV) or injected cancer drugs. Oral cancer drugs may represent the only or best treatment option in some instances. Oral cancer drugs play an increasingly important role in my day-to-day care of cancer patients.

However, some health plans impose significantly higher cost sharing requirements on cancer patients for oral cancer drugs than for IV or injected cancer drugs. In most cases this is because traditional cancer drugs are covered under the medical benefit of most insurance plans and oral cancer drugs are often covered under the outpatient drug benefit. The cost sharing burden imposed on patients can create insurmountable financial barriers for cancer patients who need access to oral cancer medications.

Ensuring that cancer patients have meaningful access to oral cancer drugs is an issue of critical clinical importance. This is not merely an issue of convenience for cancer patients or medical oncologists.

I strongly urge the committee to pass SB 625. It is the right thing to do for Michigan’s cancer patients.