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Good morning committee members, and thank you for the opportunity to share my health care story. My name is Evelyne Madalengoitia, and I live in Poughkeepsie NY. Since moving to the Hudson Valley in 1998, I have worked as a director of development for area non-profits and director of a multi-county grants program. Ten years ago I was freelancing, so I had no employer sponsored health insurance and my family could not afford commercial insurance premiums. I was 44 years old, and in good health. However, during that year, I developed some symptoms that needed attention. But without insurance to cover the costs, I delayed going to the doctor. When the symptoms continued, I did pay out of pocket for a doctor's visit, which found nothing, but suggested additional, more expensive tests. I didn't have the financial resources for more tests, and also knew that a diagnosis could label me with a pre-existing condition. So while I knew there were programs to help people who couldn't afford doctor's visits and testing, I felt that I couldn't afford to take the risk of being flagged with a pre-existing condition that would leave me no options for insurance or paying for treatment should they find anything. So I convinced myself that the symptoms were nothing to worry about.

A couple of months later I was hired full time and was offered health insurance through my employer. Despite the doctor's reassurances that my symptoms were normal, we scheduled an exploratory test. It was only five days later that I found myself back in his office for an urgent visit, in which he told me that I had an aggressive, high-grade cancer and needed to go to an oncologist immediately. He didn't even have any paperwork in hand to show me, as he had received a call from the pathology lab as soon as they had the results. That week started nine months of treatment, including major surgery, high-dose chemotherapy and radiation.

Without health insurance, I wouldn't have gone back to the doctor and gotten that test, and it is doubtful that I would be here today to tell my story. I don't want other people to face death because they cannot access our healthcare system. Too many New Yorkers are needlessly suffering due to inaction on the part of our legislators.

Cancer treatment took a toll on my body, my family and my income, for years. I implore you to see the human impact and costs that our current healthcare system has on so many New Yorkers' lives, and find it in your hearts to enact the New York Health Act now.