

Riley, Demuzio Team Up to Create Cancer Screening Program

SPRINGFIELD, IL – State Rep. Al Riley (D-Olympia Fields) and state Sen. Deanna Demuzio (D-Carlinville) passed legislation out of both chambers of the General Assembly this session to create the Colorectal Cancer Screening and Treatment Pilot Program in parts of the state with the highest number of deaths due to colon cancer.

“People without insurance coverage need to be tested for this too-often fatal cancer before it is too late,” Riley said. “Illinois residents are dying everyday because of a lack of awareness of colon cancer and because they are unable to afford potentially life-saving screening and treatment.”

Under Senate Bill 270, the Department of Public Health will provide grants for the colorectal cancer screening and tests in areas that have high rates of fatal colorectal cancer. The screening and treatment will be provided to people without health insurance who are 50 years of age or have a high risk of colon cancer. Testing will also be available to those who have exhausted their current health insurance benefits. The program will spread public information about the importance of screening and reach out to people eligible for the program in participating communities.

“Colorectal cancer often has no symptoms, which is why regular screening is so important,” said Demuzio. “I lost my husband to this disease and I want to do everything I can to help prevent others from dying of colon cancer.”

According to the American Cancer Society, colorectal cancer is the 3rd most commonly diagnosed cancer among Illinois residents and causes over 3,000 deaths a year. Screening is essential to catch the cancer in its early stages and reduces mortality by detecting a higher proportion of cancers when they are more treatable.

“Screening and early detection will lead to successful treatment for colon cancer,” said Dr. K. Thomas Robbins, Director of the SIU Cancer Institute at Southern Illinois University School of Medicine. “Senate Bill 270 is a worthy program that will save lives and cost to the health care system.”

“I am passionate about seeing this bill become law because I have no doubt it will save lives,” said Sheila Strong, American Cancer Society advocacy volunteer. “I have lost dear friends and loved ones to this disease. How many more people have to die because they can’t afford life-saving screening? Like the Illinois Breast and Cervical Cancer program that has saved the lives of so many, I truly hope to see this measure have that same success.”

Senate Bill 270 now moves to the governor’s desk for his signature.