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Statement of Danelle Yerkey

Three years ago, at age 34 and single, I was diagnosed with stage III breast cancer. I was informed shortly after my diagnosis that I carried the BRCA 1 gene which greatly increased my risk for getting cancer in other parts of my body. It was recommended by my physicians that I remove my ovaries as soon as possible, definitely before the age of 40.

I've dreamed of having a child since I can remember. I've always felt that having a child was something that God instilled in me at an early age. I even chose a career path working with and teaching young children.

When my oncologist informed me of my aggressive cancer diagnosis and the chemotherapy treatment that was required, I desperately wanted to attempt to preserve my eggs prior to starting chemotherapy. I was facing the strong probability that I may never have the ability to have children once chemotherapy started. My oncologist strongly recommended that I start chemotherapy immediately upon diagnosis, but I decided to first harvest my eggs and commence hormone therapy that accompanied egg retrieval. Losing my fertility was not an option for me, and I was determined to do everything in my power to preserve the possibility of having a child after my cancer treatment was concluded. I had to commute to Cleveland from Pittsburgh daily, alone in the midst of cancer appointments, driving between Pittsburgh and Cleveland every morning, after injecting myself in the stomach with hormones for weeks on end, just because I held on to my dream of being a mother and parent.

University Hospital was recommended to me as one of the most preeminent medical facilities for fertility treatment, egg retrieval, and storage. The doctors at University Hospital were able to retrieve 33 eggs from me and 24 were viable. I was relieved. A few days after the eggs were harvested, I ended up in the ER/hospital after suffering in pain for days after the retrieval. I was told that the pain was due to an numerous ovarian cysts that burst from the procedure.

After my successful harvesting I underwent 16 rounds of very strong chemotherapy, 25 rounds of radiation, and a double mastectomy with multiple reconstruction surgeries.

On March 9, 2018 I was informed that there was a news bulletin that there was a malfunction at the Cleveland Fertility Clinic which compromised some of the egg/embryos that were frozen and stored there. I immediately called them and was told that my eggs had in fact been compromised. In shock, I screamed and fell to my knees in the kitchen. I felt as if I were dying, and I wanted to die. The overwhelming grief was as if I lost a child. I have not stopped feeling that way since March 9. I just took a blood test this week which confirmed that my ovarian function has been ruined from the extreme chemotherapy I've undergone. My hopes and dreams have been shattered. I have no idea how I will go on. Everything has been stolen from me. My spirit is crushed.

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