



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

John J. Flanagan

Senator Flanagan Honors Dix Hills Breast Cancer Leader As His 2011 Woman Of Distinction

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- [Women](#)



At a recent ceremony in Albany, Senator John Flanagan (2nd Senate District) hosted Ms. JoAnn Pushkin to officially recognize her selection as his 2011 Woman of Distinction. The Dix Hills resident was honored for her efforts to expand access to early breast cancer detection for the 40% of women who have dense breast tissue. Ms. Pushkin, who herself is a breast cancer survivor, made the courageous decision to use her personal experience to become a leader in the fight to protect all women from a late stage diagnosis of this deadly disease.

After her diagnosis in 2005, which was originally missed because she is one of millions of women with dense breast tissue, Ms. Pushkin began an effort to raise awareness regarding the connection between breast density and breast cancer. She has worked to make sure that all women are informed of their own breast density, made aware of its risk factor in developing cancer, told about the limitations of mammography in finding tumors in dense tissue and educated on supplemental screening options.

To further her advocacy, she became a founder of both D.E.N.S.E. (Density Education National Survivors' Effort), a national grassroots effort that works to raise awareness about breast density and its inherent cancer risk, and its New York chapter D.E.N.S.E. NY. In addition, she currently serves as the Director of Government Relations for Are You Dense Advocacy, Inc. This organization supports efforts to establish a federal law for mandatory breast density disclosure which would provide all women in the nation who are affected by breast density with the opportunity for an early stage diagnosis.

It was through her work in these roles that Ms. Pushkin first contacted Senator Flanagan and began working with him to change New York State law to help other women. Together, they are working on legislation that would require insurance companies in New York State to provide supplemental screenings for women with dense breast tissue or who are at greater risk of being diagnosed with breast cancer. The legislation would also require that every report a radiologist issues to a patient following a mammogram include information on breast density and recommend that a woman, in conjunction with her referring doctor, discuss supplemental screening tools. According to Ms. Pushkin, breast density is as important a health barometer as cholesterol or blood pressure, which are both routinely supplied to patients. Requiring doctors to provide this information will allow women to make more informed decisions about their own health care.

According to leading medical studies, breast cancer is five times more likely in women with dense breast tissue but mammograms alone miss up to 40% of tumors that are present in women with dense breast tissue. By requiring insurance companies to cover supplemental screening tools and radiologists to inform women of their breast density, the legislation that Ms. Pushkin is fighting for could lead to earlier detection of breast cancer when it is most treatable and survivable.

“JoAnn has made the brave choice to turn her diagnosis into a crusade to enhance the health care of the other women throughout our state and our nation and that is truly admirable. As a father, a son and a husband, I personally appreciate her dedication to this cause and am honored to join with her to make the changes all women in our state deserve,” stated Senator Flanagan. “While she may not be able to truly appreciate the impact she is having on the lives of her fellow New Yorkers, everyone who has had the opportunity to work with her knows that this is a well-deserved honor for a truly selfless leader.”