STATE OF ARKANSAS
House of Representatives

Newsletter From Rep. Tara Shephard

District 79

October 24, 2025

Breast Cancer Awareness

October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month—a time to honor survivors, remember those we've lost, and recommit to improving access to lifesaving care. In Arkansas, breast cancer affects thousands each year. Nearly 2,400 women are diagnosed annually, and more than 400 lose their lives. Our state's breast cancer mortality rate remains higher than the national average, especially in rural and underserved communities. This year, the Arkansas House passed a set of laws that take meaningful steps to remove barriers to care and put patients first.

Act 424 ensures that beginning January 1, 2026, all medically necessary breast reconstruction surgeries are fully covered under health benefit plans. The law guarantees that treatment decisions are made between providers and patients guided by prevailing medical standards, not by insurance limitations. It also establishes fair reimbursement, strengthens prior authorization rules, sets penalties for late payment, and prohibits insurers from waiving these protections.

Act 553 eliminates out-of-pocket costs for vital services like diagnostic breast exams, cancer screenings, and supplemental imaging such as MRIs and ultrasounds. These are often necessary after abnormal mammograms or for high-risk patients. By removing cost as a barrier, the law helps ensure timely follow-up care that can be lifesaving.

Act 561 expands coverage for mastectomy-related procedures to include medical and surgical benefits for artificial or biological mesh used to support tissue and nerve grafts. This modern approach can help preserve or restore nerve function following surgery—an important advancement in reconstructive care. Coverage applies when the procedure is performed at a licensed facility.

These acts reflect a bipartisan commitment to strengthening breast cancer care across Arkansas. They help ensure that early detection, timely diagnosis, and effective treatment are within reach—regardless of income, insurance status, or geography. Let this month of awareness also be a month of action. Together, we can continue the fight against breast cancer with compassion, courage, and a shared commitment to saving lives.