October 14, 2008

Dear Senator Obama:

It has been several years since the Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act (H.R. 810 in the 109th Congress and H.R. 3 in the 110th Congress) was initially written, passed, and vetoed and science has progressed at a faster pace than we in Congress could ever have imagined. We appreciate your support of S. 5 and are encouraged by continued progress both in the fields of embryonic stem cell research and adult stem cell research. In the face of fragmented state and private research that is currently being undertaken, we also recognize the need for strong federal leadership by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in carrying out a continued ethical stem cell research program in order to realize the full potential for stem cell therapies. We are writing to emphasize the importance of your consistent support, from either the Senate or the White House, for removing existing federal barriers to funding and expansion of embryonic stem cell research, and working to put in place an overarching ethical federal framework to guide *all* stem cell research.

Looking to 2009, we recently reworked S.5 / H.R. 3 to ensure it is current with the ever-expanding field of stem cell research and to bring the NIH back to the forefront of stem cell research worldwide. Our goal in introducing H.R. 7141, the "Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act of 2008," is to help guide the discussion over the next several months, as we prepare for a new Congress and Administration.

The top priority in this new legislation was to retain the integrity and language of H.R. 3 – specifically, to expand the federal policy on embryonic stem cell research and set forth ethical requirements. The goal was to expand the scope of H.R. 3 to allow for NIH to establish guidelines for carrying out *all* stem cell research (not just embryonic) *as scientifically warranted.* With this change, the NIH will be able to establish guidelines for the research based on scientific needs and advances. Although numerous entities have published guidelines for stem cell research, there is currently no overarching set of federal guidelines to serve as the gold standard. As a result, scientists must constantly worry about meeting a patchwork of ethical requirements. Recognizing the link between beginning basic scientific research and the potential for eventual clinical trials using stem cell applications, this new legislation encourages the NIH and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to communicate on this important area of research.

We have lost valuable time since the President's Directive in 2001. With the many recent advances in stem cell techniques, it is imperative we allow all forms to flourish; scientists, not politicians, should decide which techniques have the best potential for progress in developing therapies.

Medical and scientific research, including embryonic stem cell research, holds great promise for alleviating the suffering of the 100 million American patients who are living with devastating diseases -- from Parkinson's disease to spinal cord injuries to diabetes -- for which there are no good treatments or cures. A strong federal role in carrying out such research is critical. We remain committed to driving this issue in the next Congress and with the new Administration to form an expanded and comprehensive federal policy for all stem cell research.

Sincerely,

Diana DeGette
Member of Congress

Michael N. Castle
Member of Congress