

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

December 19, 2008

President-Elect Barack Obama
The Obama – Biden Presidential Transition Project
Washington, DC 20270

Dear President-Elect Obama:

We are writing to respectfully urge that you remove existing federal barriers to embryonic stem cell research early next year. Valuable time has been lost since President Bush's restrictive Directive in 2001 and it is time for the United States to reassert its leadership in biomedical research by fostering a robust stem cell research program.

Science has progressed at a faster pace than any of us could ever have imagined and we remain 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 responsible stem cell research program. 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. And, with the many recent advances in stem cell techniques, it is imperative we allow all forms of stem cell science to flourish.

Scientists, not politicians, should decide which techniques have the best potential for progress in developing therapies. Your support for removing existing federal barriers to funding and expansion of embryonic stem cell research, and putting in place an overarching federal framework to guide responsible stem cell research is imperative.

We believe that the top priority for both an Executive Order and any complementary legislation must be to immediately revoke the prohibition on federal funding for research involving embryonic stem cell lines derived after August 9, 2001. In addition, we believe that the NIH must establish guidelines for carrying out embryonic stem cell research as well as have the ability to establish guidelines in other areas of stem cell research as scientifically warranted. Guidelines must be issued based on scientific needs and advances with the flexibility to provide periodic updates. In addition, NIH will need to outline a policy for determining eligibility for federal funding of stem cell lines that are already in existence. Recognizing the link between beginning basic scientific research and the potential for eventual clinical trials using stem cell applications, we also believe that the NIH and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) should communicate on this important area of research.

With these elements in mind, Representatives Diana DeGette and Mike Castle recently reworked the original Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act (S.5/H.R. 3), and introduced a discussion draft, H.R. 7141. A summary of the legislation and the bill text are attached.

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 this research is vitally important.

We look forward to working with all stakeholders to drive this issue in the 111th Congress and to working with your Administration to form a robust federal stem cell research policy—one that immediately removes existing federal barriers to funding for embryonic stem cell research and puts in place new scientific and ethical guidelines for the federal funding of such research. We look forward to continued discussions on your plans for an Executive Order and also sharing with you our plan for corresponding legislation in 111th Congress. Thank you, again, for your support.

Sincerely,



Diana DeGette
Member of Congress



Michael Castle
Member of Congress



Mary Bono Mack
Member of Congress



Tammy Baldwin
Member of Congress



Charles Dent
Member of Congress



Russ Carnahan
Member of Congress



Lois Capps
Member of Congress



Mark Kirk
Member of Congress



Henry Waxman
Member of Congress



Ed Perlmutter
Member of Congress



Fred Upton
Member of Congress