

July 18, 2017

The Honorable Rodney P. Frelinghuysen, Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
H-305, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Frelinghuysen:

On behalf of the millions of patients throughout the nation and around the world, as well as the scientific and medical communities dedicated to advancing human health, the undersigned organizations and institutions join the International Society for Stem Cell Research in expressing our collective and strong opposition to provisions in the Fiscal Year 2018 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill that would ban federal funding for fetal tissue research. If enacted, this legislation would severely impede research that is necessary for the development of new treatments for a wide range of serious and incurable diseases.

Fetal tissue research advances scientific knowledge, improves human health, and saves lives

Fetal tissue research has been critical for scientific and medical advances that have saved the lives of millions of people, including the development of vaccines against polio, rubella, measles, chickenpox, adenovirus, rabies, as well as treatments for debilitating diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis, cystic fibrosis, and hemophilia.

Fetal tissue remains an essential “gold-standard” resource that enables research into how human tissues develop and are impacted by disease. Without fetal tissue research, it is not possible to fully understand congenital defects such as those of the heart or nervous system, or to understand how viruses like Zika virus impact fetal development. Indeed, the use of donated fetal tissue has been critical for understanding how Zika virus crosses the placenta and impacts human brain development. The insights gained through studies of Zika virus in human fetal tissue are already guiding the development of drugs to protect unborn babies. These examples illustrate how, far from protecting life, legislation that limits human fetal tissue research would impede the development of critical new treatments.¹

There are no substitutes that replace fetal tissue

It has been incorrectly stated that other cells can be used to replace fetal tissue in biomedical research. In fact, fetal tissue represents a specific, formative period of human development, and

the cells in fetal tissues have unique and valuable properties that often cannot be replaced by other cell types. Cells from fetal tissues are more flexible and less specialized than cells from adult tissue, making it possible to grow fetal cells much more readily than many kinds of adult cells. This is part of the reason why cells from fetal tissue were used in the generation of many of the vaccines that are used today. Human fetal tissues also must be studied in order to understand how birth defects arise and how they can be prevented. Human fetal tissue provides an unparalleled window into the complexity of human tissue development and why serious congenital defects sometimes arise.

Tissue from spontaneous abortions is not a reliable substitute for tissue from induced abortions because spontaneous abortions often result from developmental abnormalities or other conditions that undermine the usefulness of the tissue for research. Furthermore, spontaneous abortions generally do not occur in settings where the fetal tissues can be adequately preserved for research.

There is a well-established, rigorous oversight and regulatory framework for fetal tissue research

Rigorous legal and ethical oversight of fetal tissue research has been in place for decades and there is broad agreement among ethicists, physicians, and scientists that fetal tissue research is performed ethically.

Fetal tissue research has garnered bipartisan support in the U.S. Congress and has been funded by the National Institutes of Health for decades. In 1988, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) appointed an advisory panel to evaluate the ethical, legal, and scientific issues surrounding fetal tissue research. After months of public hearings and deliberation, the panel concluded that the use of human fetal tissue in research following induced abortions is acceptable public policy.

The NIH Revitalization Act of 1993 imposes restrictions on fetal tissue research and mandate that research on transplantation for therapeutic purposes *must* be conducted in accordance with applicable state and local law, with written informed consent from the donor. The attending physician must also sign a written statement affirming that the decision to abort and the decision to donate tissue for fetal research are not related.

Current law also provides for significant criminal and civil penalties for the purchase or sale of fetal tissue, or soliciting or acquiring fetal tissue after providing “valuable consideration” for the costs associated with the abortion itself.

Thus, decades of thoughtful deliberation on these issues have provided a statutory and ethical foundation for fetal tissue research to progress, which has enabled the discovery of new treatments that would have otherwise not have been possible.

The devastating impact of constraining fetal tissue research

Ongoing access to human fetal tissue that has been obtained legally and with donor consent is required to address many important questions in biomedical research and for the development of new therapies. We urge you to oppose the restriction of fetal tissue research and to support the families who are relying on biomedical research to develop new treatments for the diseases that affect Americans.

Sincerely,

Academic Pediatric Association
American Academy of Pediatrics
American Association for the Advancement of Science
American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
American Pediatric Society
American Society for Cell Biology
American Society for Reproductive Medicine
American Society of Hematology
Americans for Cures
Association of American Medical Colleges
Association of American Universities
Association of Medical School Pediatric Department Chairs
Association of Public and Land-grant Universities
Coalition for Life Sciences
Huntington's Disease Society of America
International Society for Stem Cell Research
National Multiple Sclerosis Society
Pediatric Policy Council
Prevent Blindness
Prevent Cancer Foundation
Society for Pediatric Research
Texans for Cures
The Michael J. Fox Foundation
Tuberous Sclerosis Alliance