July 28, 2020

NIH Human Fetal Tissue Research Ethics Advisory Board-FY2020
Office of Science Policy
National Institutes of Health
6705 Rockledge Drive, Suite 750
Bethesda, MD 20892

Dear Members of the NIH Human Fetal Tissue Research Ethics Advisory Board,

On behalf of the scientific, medical, and patient communities dedicated to advancing human health, we write to express our collective, strong support for the continued use of human fetal tissue in life-saving biomedical research. As you evaluate the ethics of research proposals necessitating the use of human fetal tissue, we urge you to consider its potential to advance our understanding of human biology and the development of new treatments that will reduce suffering from human diseases.

Research using human fetal tissue has been essential for scientific and medical advances that have saved millions of lives, and it remains a crucial resource for biomedical research. Fetal tissue has unique and valuable properties that often cannot be replaced by other cell types. Cells from fetal tissue are more flexible and less specialized than cells from adult tissue and can be more readily grown in culture. This is part of the reason why fetal tissue is used for the generation of vaccines and for studying infectious diseases like Zika, HIV, and other viruses. It is also the reason why human fetal tissue is used to develop and validate model systems to study the progression of diseases and test new therapeutics.

While some have argued that advances in recent years have reduced the need for fetal tissue in certain areas of research, fetal tissue remains the gold standard for evaluating the accuracy of models of human fetal development. Fetal tissue also remains an essential resource for studying complex interactions between cells. Fetal cell lines are not a substitute for fetal tissue, because they are limited to a small number of cell types and are inadequate for studying complex interactions between cells. Similarly, organoids and stem cell model systems are simplistic models that only mimic certain aspects of human development. Finally, tissue from spontaneous abortions is not a reliable substitute for tissue from induced abortions, because they often result from genetic defects, developmental abnormalities, or other conditions that undermine the availability and usefulness of the tissue.

The long-standing existing review process for fetal tissue research ensures that research using fetal tissue is scientifically meritorious, legal, and ethically sound. The legal framework for this research prohibits people from profiting from acquiring, receiving, or transferring fetal tissue for research. Each research proposal has already been favorably evaluated by subject matter experts on NIH study sections for scientific and technical merit, including significance, innovation, and approach. As the nation

continues to respond to the coronavirus pandemic, we urge you to consider the potential of fetal tissue research to accelerate the development of new vaccines and viral therapies, not only for coronavirus but also for other incurable viral pathogens such as Zika and HIV. Fetal tissue research has the potential to accelerate the end to the pandemic, reduce human suffering, and enable the U.S. to better respond to future public health threats.

As organizations representing scientists, clinicians, and patients driven by a desire to improve the health and well-being of all, we urge you to consider the scientific and medical significance of fetal tissue research and its crucial role in the development of new therapies. Thank you for considering our views.

Sincerely,

Academic Pediatric Association
AIDS Foundation Chicago
AIDS Treatment Activists Coalition (ATAC)
Alliance for Aging Research
American Academy of HIV Medicine
American Academy of Pediatrics
American Association for Anatomy
American Association for the Advancement of Science
American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy
American Association of Immunologists
American Brain Coalition
American Institute of Biological Sciences
American Pediatric Society
American Physiological Society
American Society for Cell Biology
American Society for Investigative Pathology
American Society for Reproductive Medicine (ASRM)
American Society of Hematology
American Society of Human Genetics
American Thoracic Society
Association of American Medical Colleges
Association of American Universities
Association of Independent Research Institutes
Association of Medical School Pediatric Department Chairs
Association of Public & Land-Grant Universities
AVAC
Axis Advocacy
Boston University
Coalition for the Life Sciences
Columbia University Irving Medical Center

Council on Governmental Relations
Duke University
Endocrine Society
Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology
Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center
GLMA: Health Professionals Advancing LGBTQ Equality
Global Healthy Living Foundation
Harvard University
HIV Medicine Association
HIV+Aging Research Project-Palm Springs
Infectious Diseases Society of America
International Foundation for Autoimmune & Autoinflammatory Arthritis (AiArthritis)
International Society for Stem Cell Research
ISCT, International Society for Cell & Gene Therapy
Jacobs Institute of Women's Health
Johns Hopkins University
Massachusetts General Hospital
Medical College of WI
Medical Students for Choice
Michigan State University
National Alliance for Eye and Vision Research
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Coalition for LGBT Health
National Women's Health Network
Nebraska Coalition for Lifesaving Research
NYU Langone Health
Pediatric Policy Council
Princeton University
Research!America
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine
Society for Neuroscience
Society for Pediatric Research
Society of Family Planning
Society of Toxicology
Stanford University
Stony Brook University
Texans for Cures
The Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson's Research
The New York Stem Cell Foundation
The State University of New York
Treatment Action Group
Tuberous Sclerosis Alliance

UCLA
Union of Concerned Scientists
University at Buffalo
University of California San Diego
University of California System
University of California, Irvine
University of California, San Francisco
University of Illinois College of Medicine
University of Massachusetts Medical School
University of Michigan
University of Oregon
University of Pittsburgh
University of Rochester
University of Washington
University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Medicine and Public Health
Weill Cornell Medicine
Yale University