



**Association of
American Medical Colleges**
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July 30, 2020

Executive Secretary
NIH Human Fetal Tissue Research Ethics Advisory Board—FY 2020
Office of Science Policy
National Institutes of Health
Bethesda, MD 20892

Dear Members of the Human Fetal Tissue Research Ethics Advisory Board:

As you meet to consider recommendations with respect to the scientifically meritorious research proposals before the Advisory Board, I write to express the strong support of the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) for the ethical use of fetal tissue in medical research.

The AAMC is a not-for-profit association dedicated to transforming health care through medical education, patient care, medical research, and community collaborations. Its members are all 155 accredited U.S. and 17 accredited Canadian medical schools; more than 400 teaching hospitals and health systems, including Department of Veterans Affairs medical centers; and more than 70 academic societies. Through these institutions and organizations, the AAMC serves the leaders of America's medical schools and teaching hospitals and their more than 179,000 full-time faculty members, 92,000 medical students, 140,000 resident physicians, and 60,000 graduate students and postdoctoral researchers in the biomedical sciences. Additional information about the AAMC is available at www.aamc.org.

Fetal tissue research over the last several decades has helped advance vaccines to protect the population against a range of diseases, has improved our understanding of human development, and has led to promising discoveries that could help patients battling end-stage breast cancer, diabetes, Parkinson's disease, and other conditions. Additionally, because of its unique properties, fetal tissue from induced abortions serves as a gold reference standard in developmental biology in a way that tissue from spontaneous abortions cannot substitute, as a result of the genetic and developmental abnormalities that lead to such miscarriages.

Guardrails already exist to prevent misuse. A strict legal framework for fetal tissue research imposes criminal penalties against any individual who acquires, receives, or transfers fetal tissue for profit, and the National Institutes of Health's rigorous review process evaluates proposals for scientific and technical merit, including significance, innovation, and approach, before recommending proposals for funding.

The current COVID-19 pandemic is illustrating that we cannot fully anticipate the health challenges our nation will face at any given moment, and a robust, ongoing federal commitment to scientific inquiry across a diverse range of thought, methodologies, and models is essential to building the nation's resilience. We cannot afford to block principled, scientifically sound and rigorously evaluated research that will yield new insights into human biology. The consequences – delaying or preventing discovery to address both known and novel, unknown threats – would carry a heavy ethical toll that must be given weight in your deliberations.

As the Advisory Board meets, we urge you to consider the significant value of compliant and meritorious proposals that will inform efforts to develop new therapies and improve the human condition.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ross McKinney, Jr., MD". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "R" and a distinct "MD" at the end.

Ross McKinney, Jr., MD
AAMC Chief Science Officer