

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HJM 4030

As Reported by House Committee On:
Health Care

Brief Description: Encouraging stem cell research.

Sponsors: Representatives Schual-Berke, Wood, Ruderman, Chase, Sullivan, Murray, McIntire, Hunt, Hankins, Cody, Moeller, Kagi and Sommers.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Health Care: 1/21/04, 2/3/04 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requests the representatives of the federal government to increase funding for human embryonic stem cell and germ cell research.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH CARE

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 7 members: Representatives Cody, Chair; Morrell, Vice Chair; Clibborn, Darneille, Edwards, Moeller and Schual-Berke.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 6 members: Representatives Bailey, Ranking Minority Member; Alexander, Benson, Campbell, Rodne and Skinner.

Staff: Chris Blake (786-7392).

Background:

The Biology of Stem Cells

Stem cells can be distinguished from other types of cells in three ways. First, they are capable of dividing and replicating (renewing) themselves indefinitely. Second, stem cells are unspecialized. This means that they do not perform any specific function, as do heart muscle cells, red blood cells, or nerve cells. Lastly, stem cells can create specialized cells. While they do not perform a particular function, they can give rise to specialized cells while remaining unspecialized themselves.

Stem cells can be classified as embryonic stem cells, embryonic germ cells, and adult stem cells according to the stage of development of the organism. The key difference between embryonic stem cells and adult stem cells is that an embryonic stem cell can become any type of cell in the body, while adult stem cells can only vary between the different types of cells

within the organ in which they are found. Recent research, however, suggests that adult bone marrow stem cells may have similar characteristics. Another significant difference is that embryonic stem cell replication can generate large numbers of new cells, while adult stem cells do not replicate as easily (under current technology).

Scientists obtain human embryonic stem cells from embryos that are not used after in vitro fertilization treatment. In 1998, scientists first isolated and cultured human embryonic stem cells, a process that destroys the embryo. Current research using stem cells pertains to diabetes, Parkinson's disease, heart disease, cancer, and spinal cord injury.

Federal and State Policy on Stem Cells

In August 2001, the President announced that federal funding of embryonic stem cell research would be permitted for research on the embryonic stem cell lines in existence at that time, but the funding would not be available for any subsequently created embryonic stem cell lines. The limitation does not apply to privately funded research. At the same time, the President announced the creation of the President's Council on Bioethics to study the ethical and moral implications of developments in biomedical and behavioral science and technology.

Summary of Bill:

The Legislature requests that federal funding be made available to support research involving human embryonic stem cells and human embryonic germ cells, including somatic cell nuclear transplantation, upon full consideration of the ethical and medical implications. This request is addressed to President Bush, the United States Senate and House of Representatives, the Secretary of the United States Department of Health and Human Services, and the Director of the National Institutes of Health.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Testimony For: Unused embryos should be used for productive purposes rather than discarded. Embryonic stem cell research holds promise for curing several diseases. Researchers will leave the state if there is not an environment that promotes this type of research.

Testimony Against: Embryonic stem cell research is unsafe, unethical, and unnecessary. Human life begins with one-celled embryos and this will destroy them.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Daniel Kowach; Jackie Der, University of Washington Medicine; Pat Kessler, Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation; and Hans Wold, Northwest Hereditary Disease Foundation.

(Opposed) Sharon Quick, American Academy of Medical Ethics; and Sister Sharon Park, Washington State Catholic Conference.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.