Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

April 28, 2004

Dear Mr. President:

We write to urge you to expand the current federal policy concerning embryonic stem cell research.

As you know, embryonic stem cells have the potential to be used to treat and better understand deadly and disabling diseases that affect more than 100 million Americans, such as cancer, heart disease, diabetes, Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, multiple sclerosis, spinal cord injury, and many others.

Embryonic stem cells are derived from in vitro fertilized (IVF) embryos that are developed in excess of those needed for the process to allow infertile couples to have children. The IVF process results in more embryos than are needed by the couple. There are estimated to be more than 400,000 IVF embryos, which are currently frozen and will likely be destroyed if not donated, with informed consent of the couple, for research.

We very much appreciate your words of support for the enormous potential of this research, and we know that you intended your policy to help promote this research to its fullest. As you know, the Administration's policy limits federal funding only to embryonic stem cells that were derived by August 9, 2001, the date of the policy announcement.

However, scientists have told us that since the policy went into effect more than two years ago, we have learned much more about why the embryonic stem cell lines eligible for federal funding will not be suitable to effectively promote this research. We therefore feel it is essential to relax the restrictions in the current policy for this research to be fully explored.

Among the current challenges with the current policy are the following:

- While it originally appeared that 78 embryonic stem cell lines would be available for research under the federal policy, now, more than two years after August 9, 2001, only 19 are available to researchers.

- All available stem cell lines are contaminated with mouse feeder cells, making their therapeutic use for humans uncertain.

- Scientists are reporting that it is increasingly difficult to attract new scientists to this area of research because of concerns that funding restrictions will keep this research from being successful.

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- This promising field of research is moving overseas. We have already seen researchers move to countries like the United Kingdom, which have more supportive policies. In fact, leadership in this area of research has shifted to the United Kingdom, which sees this scientific area as a cornerstone of its biotech industry and which is leading the International Stem Cell Forum, made up of scientific agencies from nearly a dozen countries.

Mr. President, we know that you have been a strong supporter of medical research and share our commitment to curing disease and alleviating human suffering. We would very much like to work with you to modify the current embryonic stem cell policy so that it provides this area of research the greatest opportunity to lead to the treatments and cures we all are hoping for.

Sincerely,

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Member of Congress

MICHAEL CASTLE
Member of Congress

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Member of Congress

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Member of Congress

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