May 23, 2005

All Members
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative:

As presidents and chancellors of the leading public and private research universities of the Association of American Universities (AAU), we urge you to vote in favor of H.R. 810, the Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act of 2005, as introduced by Representatives Michael Castle and Diana DeGette. This legislation will broaden the current federal policy on embryonic stem cell research to authorize federally funded research on cell lines created from embryos developed for in-vitro fertilization (IVF) that otherwise would be discarded.

On August 9, 2001, President Bush announced a policy of allowing federally funded research using human embryonic stem cells. He said he was doing so because scientists see a unique potential in embryonic stem cell research for improving the lives of those suffering from diseases such as Alzheimer’s, Parkinson’s, and spinal cord injuries. At the time of the President’s speech, it was thought that more than 60 human embryonic stem cell lines would be available for such research. Today, only 22 such sources are actually available to researchers, and of those 22, only five are held in the United States. As Dr. Elizabeth Nabel, Director of the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute at the National Institutes of Health, testified recently before Congress, "progress has been delayed by the limited number of cell lines." If U.S. researchers are going to explore fully the potential of embryonic stem cell research, the existing, eligible lines are clearly inadequate. H.R. 810 would take a significant step toward addressing this problem.

While this research has the potential to help millions of people in our country and around the world suffering from debilitating diseases, the nation also must pay heed to the ethical concerns that many Americans have regarding embryonic stem cell research. H.R. 810 does so. The bill is carefully written so as not to encourage the creation of human embryos for research or any other purposes. Research made possible by this legislation would be limited to stem cells derived from embryos created through IVF that ultimately will not be used. Indeed, these embryos would have otherwise been destroyed. H.R. 810 permits their use only with the informed consent of the donors. Moreover, to remove any possible incentive for the creation of embryos, donors may not be compensated for any such donation.

Embryonic stem cell research using non-federally funded sources is already occurring in states such as California and around the world. Indeed, in the absence of a broad, federal stem cell research policy, NIH Director Elias Zerhouni has testified to Congress that the current state-by-state patchwork of policies "could inhibit critical collaborations between scientists operating under different laws and regulations." And Thursday’s announcement that South Korean scientists have developed stem cell lines that will allow insight into such
Afflictions as juvenile diabetes, immune deficiencies, and spinal cord injury is an indication that U.S. scientists are being hobbled in their pursuit of cures and therapies using this promising research. Although the laboratory technique used in South Korea would not be allowed under this bill, H.R. 810 would dramatically increase the ability of U.S. scientists to advance this critical and promising research. Indeed, the only way to ensure that stem cell research across the United States is conducted in an ethical, regulated, and transparent fashion, and that allows U.S. scientists to lead, is to broaden federal support. As the National Academies reported in *Stem Cells and the Future of Regenerative Medicine*:

Human stem cell research that is publicly funded and conducted under established standards of open scientific exchange, peer review, and public oversight offers the most efficient and responsible means to fulfill the promise of stem cells to meet the need for regenerative medical therapies.

The Association of American Universities urges a vote in favor of H.R. 810 to accelerate the hope and promise of stem cell research and to ensure that the United States maintains its leadership role in the ethical development of new cures and therapies for all of mankind.

Sincerely,

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