August 29, 2001

Tommy G. Thompson  
Secretary of Health and Human Services  
200 Independence Ave., SW  
Hubert H. Humphrey Bldg.  
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Thompson:

On behalf of the Board of Directors of the Coalition for the Advancement of Medical Research (CAMR), I write to follow up on our August 10 meeting with you when we discussed the President's stem cell research policy. We reiterate our sincere appreciation for your continued support of the need for federal funding of embryonic stem cell research.

The scientific community was surprised to learn through President Bush's address to the nation that more than sixty stem cell lines are in existence. On August 27, NIH publicly identified 64 stem cell lines and their locations. This new information will assist the scientific community in further analyzing the stem cell lines' sufficiency for research purposes.

While we're pleased that the Department of Health and Human Services and the National Institutes of Health are moving forward expeditiously to implement the policy and begin reviewing and funding grant applications, we still have serious concerns about the adequacy of these lines to achieve our common goal-therapies and cures for the millions of Americans who suffer from devastating diseases. We would greatly appreciate receiving any answers that you might have for the following questions:

1. Have any government officials conducted site visits at laboratories that control the stem cell lines? If not, are any planned?
2. Are the existing stem cell lines sufficiently genetically diverse to be used for therapeutic purposes?
3. How many of the existing stem cell lines have been mixed in the laboratory with animal cells? Will the Food and Drug Administration permit any of the existing stem cell lines to be the basis of clinical trials?
4. Will NIH develop a repository so that extramural researchers can have easier access to stem cell lines?
5. Will NIH help researchers overcome any obstacles generated by the owners' proprietary interests and concerns? Since many of the stem cell lines are in foreign countries, are there any foreign laws or regulations that will restrict the ability of scientists to obtain the lines?

Mr. Secretary, the Coalition for the Advancement of Medical Research looks forward to an ongoing partnership with you and your Department to implement the federal stem cell policy. We thank you for the information that NIH has provided in the August 27 release and are eager to continue working with leading embryonic stem cell researchers to determine if these lines are adequate to achieve the goal that we share—speedy development of therapies to help Americans who are suffering from diseases. In addition, we hope to have the opportunity to provide you with suggestions on how to amend the policy, if necessary, to reach this objective.

In the meantime, we again thank you for your personal attention to this critical issue, and the work that your department and NIH have done so far to implement the President's limited plan.

Sincerely,

Lawrence A. Soler
Chairman
Coalition for the Advancement of Medical Research

cc: Ruth L. Kirschstein
Director, National Institutes of Health

Lana R. Skirboll
Director, Office of Science Policy, NIH