

September 10, 2018

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader, U.S. Senate
S-230, US Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Democratic Leader, U.S. Senate
S-221, US Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Paul Ryan
Speaker, U.S. House of
Representatives
H-232 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Democratic Leader, U.S. House of
Representatives
H-204, US Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Democratic Leader Schumer, Speaker Ryan, and Democratic Leader Pelosi:

On behalf of the millions of patients throughout the nation and around the world, as well as the scientific and medical communities dedicated to advancing human health, the undersigned organizations and institutions write to express our collective and strong opposition to restrictions that would further impede the use of federal funding for fetal tissue research. If enacted, the proposed prohibition would severely obstruct research that is necessary for the development of new treatments for a wide range of serious diseases.

Public policy that facilitates ethically responsible research is in the best interest of patients worldwide. Decades of thoughtful deliberation on fetal tissue research has provided an ethical and policy framework for valuable medical research to progress, which has enabled the discovery of new treatments that would not otherwise have been possible. We believe the ethical considerations fall heavily in favor of permitting continued federal funding of fetal tissue research, conducted in accordance with current federal rules. To do otherwise would be disruptive to biomedical research and devastating to patients.

Fetal tissue research advances science, improves human health, and saves lives

Fetal tissue research has been critical for scientific and medical advances that have saved the lives of millions of people; including the development of vaccines against polio, rubella, measles, chickenpox, adenovirus, rabies; and treatments for debilitating diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis, cystic fibrosis, and hemophilia.

Fetal tissue remains a critical resource that enables research into how human tissues develop and are impacted by disease. Using fetal tissue allows researchers to more fully understand congenital defects such as those of the heart or nervous system and to understand how viruses like the Zika virus impact fetal development. Indeed, the use of

donated fetal tissue has been critical for understanding how Zika virus crosses the placenta and impacts human brain development. The insights gained through studies of Zika virus in human fetal tissue are already guiding the development of therapies to prevent transmission of the virus. These examples illustrate how legislation that limits human fetal tissue research would hinder the development of critical new treatments and potentially cost lives.

Fetal tissue was also essential for the development of a therapy to prevent the transmission of HIV (Truvada). There are clinical trials underway using cells from fetal tissue as treatments for Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), spinal cord injury, and Parkinson's disease. Fetal tissue is thus medically important to understand human development, to test new therapies, and as a source of cells for new cell therapies that offer the potential to improve the treatment of major public health problems.

It has been incorrectly stated that other cells can be used to replace fetal tissue in biomedical research. In fact, cells in fetal tissue have unique and valuable properties that often cannot be replaced by other cell types. Cells from fetal tissue are more flexible and less specialized than cells from adult tissue and can be more readily grown in culture. This is part of the reason why fetal tissue is used in the generation of many of the vaccines made today. The study of human fetal tissue also helps researchers understand how birth defects arise and how they can be prevented. It provides an unparalleled window into the complexity of human tissue development, including why serious congenital defects sometimes arise.

Tissue from spontaneous abortions is not a reliable substitute for tissue from "induced" abortions.¹ Spontaneous abortions, commonly called miscarriages, often result from genetic defects, developmental abnormalities, or other conditions that undermine the usefulness of the tissue for research and generally do not occur in settings where the fetal tissue can be adequately preserved for research.

There are well-established and rigorous regulatory frameworks for fetal tissue research

Rigorous legal and ethical oversight of fetal tissue research has been in place for decades. This area of research has garnered bipartisan support in the U.S. Congress and has been funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Numerous federal panels and reviews, conducted under both Republican and Democratic congressional majorities and presidential administrations, have evaluated human fetal tissue research and have concluded that it is critical for lifesaving biomedical research. This research has long been viewed as good public policy to improve human health and has proceeded with public support.

¹ The language in the House Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2019, Section 532, would prohibit "funds being used to conduct or support research using human fetal tissue if such tissue is obtained pursuant to an induced abortion."

Human fetal tissue research is thus critical to addressing important questions in biomedical research, and for the development of new therapies. Legal and ethical frameworks that are already in place ensure appropriate oversight, and that human fetal tissue is obtained legally and with donor consent. We urge you to oppose restrictions to this research and to support the families who are relying on biomedical research to develop new treatments for diseases that affect millions of people around the world.

Sincerely,

Academic Pediatric Association
Alliance for Aging Research
American Academy of Pediatrics
American Association for the Advancement of Science
American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy
American Association of Immunologists
American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
American Pediatric Society
American Society for Cell Biology
American Society for Investigative Pathology
American Society for Reproductive Medicine
American Society of Hematology
Americans for Cures
Association of American Medical Colleges
Association of American Universities
Association of Independent Research Institutes
Association of Medical School Pediatric Department Chairs
Association of Public and Land-grant Universities
Boston University School of Medicine
Brown University
Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation
Coalition for the Life Sciences
Columbia University Irving Medical Center
Council on Governmental Relations
Endocrine Society
Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology
Harvard University
Indiana University
International Society for Cell & Gene Therapy
International Society for Stem Cell Research
Johns Hopkins University
Massachusetts General Hospital
National Multiple Sclerosis Society
New York University

Pediatric Policy Council
Research!America
Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences
Society for Pediatric Research
Stanford University
Stony Brook Medicine
Texans for Cures
The Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson's Research
The Nebraska Coalition for Lifesaving Cures
The New York Stem Cell Foundation
The State University of New York System
The State University of New York Upstate Medical University
Tuberous Sclerosis Alliance
University at Buffalo
University of California System
University of California, Davis
University of California, Irvine
University of California, Los Angeles
University of California, Riverside
University of California, San Diego
University of California, San Francisco (UCSF)
University of Michigan
University of Minnesota
University of Pennsylvania
University of Pittsburgh
University of Washington
University of Wisconsin-Madison
Washington State University
Weill Cornell Medicine
Yale University