



Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities

3211 FOURTH STREET NE • WASHINGTON DC 20017-1194 • 202-541-3070 • FAX 202-541-3054
EMAIL: PROLIFE@USCCB.ORG • WEBSITE: WWW.USCCB.ORG/PROLIFE

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Dear Senator:

I am writing to urge your support for the “Stem Cell Therapeutic and Research Act of 2005” (S. 1317) sponsored by Senator Orrin Hatch. The House version of this bill (H.R. 2520), sponsored by Rep. Chris Smith, was approved 431-to-1 by the House on May 24.

Embryonic stem cell research raises grave moral objections because it requires the destruction of human life, and its possible use in future treatments remains a speculation. By contrast, this bill relates to an area of stem cell research and treatment that is indisputably acceptable on moral grounds and remarkably promising in terms of clinical benefits: The use of umbilical cord blood retrieved immediately after live births.

Umbilical cord blood stem cells have successfully treated thousands of patients with dozens of diseases. They also exhibit properties once associated chiefly with embryonic stem cells: They grow rapidly in culture, producing enough cells to be clinically useful in both children and adults; they can treat patients who are not an exact genetic match, without being rejected as foreign tissue; and they seem able to produce a wide array of different cell types.

Embryonic stem cells’ tendency to proliferate into many cell types, once seen as an advantage, has become an enormous safety problem, as these cells produce cancerous growths when placed in animals. Umbilical cord blood stem cells, by contrast, show great versatility without exhibiting dangerous uncontrollable growth. Recently the *New England Journal of Medicine* reported on successful use of umbilical cord blood to treat two devastating *neurological* diseases in children: Hurler’s syndrome (May 6, 2004) and infantile Krabbe’s Disease (May 19, 2005).

What is preventing far broader use of umbilical cord blood stem cells is not an ethical concern, or any lack of evidence of clinical benefits, but simply a lack of funding and access. By helping to establish a nationwide public cord blood bank, this legislation will begin saving more lives almost immediately. By contrast, scientists are now warning against “false expectations” regarding embryonic stem cells, pointing out that clinical use of those cells might be “three to five decades” away (“Scientist: Stem Cell Work Will Aid Humans,” AP, May 22, 2005).

If you want to see life-saving cures from stem cells in our lifetime, you will vote for the Stem Cell Therapeutic and Research Act of 2005.

Sincerely,

Cardinal William H. Keeler
Archbishop of Baltimore
Chairman, Committee for Pro-Life Activities
U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops