United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 4, 2004

The Honorable George W. Bush
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

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 and conditions 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 can be derived from in vitro fertilized (IVF) embryos that are developed in excess of those needed for the procedure used to enable 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 that 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 difficult 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.

- Despite the fact that U.S. scientists were the first to derive human embryonic stem cells, leadership in this area of research is shifting to other countries such as the United Kingdom, Singapore, South Korea, and Australia.

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 for which we are all hoping.

Sincerely,

Arlen Specter

Tom Harkin

Dianne Feinstein

Orrin Hatch

Ted Kennedy

Jim Jeffords

Susan Collins

Patty Murray

Patrick Leahy

Carl Levin

Chuck Hagel

John D. Rockefeller

Dick Durbin

Fritz Hollings

John Edwards

Daniel K. Akaka

Barbara Boxer

Mary Landrieu

Jeff Bingaman

Jim Jeffords

Charles Schumer

Mark Dayton

Frank R. Lautenberg

Herb Kohl

Jack Reed

Paul Sarbanes

Olympia Snowe

Bill Nelson

Byron L. Dorgan

Tom F. Harkin

Russell D. Feingold

Max Baucus

Debbie Stabenow

Mary L. Landrieu

Kay Bailey Hutchison

Sim Johnson

J. Lieberman

Barbara A. Mikulski

Bob Graham

Thad Cochran

Jay Rockefeller

Ted Stevens

Eric Bayh

Joe Biden

Harry Reid

Lamar Alexander

Tom Carper

Orrin Snowy

Robert C. Byrd

John McCain

Blanche L. Lincoln

Hillary Rodham Clinton

Trent Lott

Ben Nighthorse Campbell