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Condino: Stem cell vote to come in new year

The House Judiciary Committee will likely vote on legislation lifting the state's restrictions on embryonic stem cell research in early 2008, Chair Rep. Paul Condino (D-Southfield) said this week.

Votes on HB 4616, HB 4617 and HB 4618 in committee will also likely follow with votes on the package by the entire chamber.

After taking testimony on the legislation in November, the committee moved onto other issues like making changes to the selection of jury pools before voting on the stem cell issue, but Mr. Condino said he wants to revisit the matter in the New Year.

Meanwhile, opponents of the legislation continue to participate in educational efforts so people know the difference between adult and embryonic stem cell research and why adult stem cell research is more beneficial and does not involve destroying an embryo, said Dave Maluchnik, spokesperson for the Michigan Catholic Conference.

Mr. Maluchnik said the new information has been provided to their supporters on the recent discoveries by researchers at Kyoto University and the University of Wisconsin who used cheek cells from a middle-aged woman and foreskin cells from a newborn baby to isolate human stem cells. Opponents of embryonic stem cell research say the announcement means the state doesn't need to change its law, while proponents of relaxing the law say all research in this area should be pursued.

The idea behind the House voting on the measure is to gauge support for changing the law and if there aren't enough votes to move the package to the Senate, that will be an indication to proponents to move forward with a ballot proposal in 2008, supporters said.

Marcia Baum, executive director for Michigan Citizens for Stem Cell Research and Cures, said the original mission of the group was to educate the entire state on stem cell research and its developments and that has continued and will continue.

"We just intend to blitz the state and there is no shortage of people asking us to do this work," she said.

The ballot committee, Stem Cell Research B.Q.C, has been organized and is expected to make its decision to pursue a November 2008 ballot drive after the first of the year, Ms. Baum said.

Asked whether the House action or inaction will be the indicator for action on their part, Ms. Baum said the committee is aware of the possibility of voting, but that the feasibility of doing a statewide campaign is being assessed at this time. There is no lack of interest on the subject of stem cell research, she said.

The ballot question committee was formed in October and has no fundraising records available yet.

Mr. Maluchnik said their group has been in talks about what to do in the case of a ballot drive, but what anti-embryonic stem cell campaign may be devised won't be solidified until the proponents of that research decide what their next move is.

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