



October 22, 2008

Proposal 2's changes are sensible science; Loosen limits

ANN ARBOR NEWS EDITORIAL BOARD

Both sides of the debate over Proposal 2 on the Nov. 4 ballot argue that they are promoting life.

Those who back the measure, which would expand the use of embryonic stem cells, argue that those cells are crucial to research that could give new life to patients with diseases such as Parkinson's and Alzheimer's, diabetes and heart disease.

Those who oppose the amendment to the state Constitution argue that using embryonic stem cells for research is immoral because obtaining those cells involves destroying a human embryo. The cells are grown from a certain type of cell removed from excess embryos created as part of in-vitro fertilization efforts.

Proposal 2 seeks to remove the shackles from medical researchers in Michigan by giving them expanded access to embryonic stem cells, which hold the promise of new treatments and cures.

We urge voters to say yes to Proposal 2.

Right now, state law prohibits the destruction of an embryo for use in stem cell research. Scientists are limited to using federally approved lines of embryonic stem cells created before 2001 or those obtained from out of state using private dollars. But scientists, including those at the University of Michigan, where much of the state's research using stem cells is concentrated, say those rules put serious limits on their work - limits that do not exist in some other states.

Unfortunately, the vigorous campaign against Proposal 2 has employed a campaign of misinformation that stretches the truth instead of sticking to the strongly held beliefs by the Catholic Church and Right to Life - the main opponents - that human life begins at the cellular level.

As proposed, this amendment to the state Constitution would prohibit state and local laws that prevent, restrict or discourage stem cell research. It expands the use of embryonic stem cells - the most important types of stem cells in medical research - but also places appropriate limits on which cells can be used.

The proposal would allow the use of embryonic stem cells for any research allowed under federal law as long as the embryos are created for fertility treatments; are not suitable for implantation or

are in excess of clinic needs; would be discarded unless used in research; and were donated by those seeking fertility treatment.

In addition, stem cells must not be taken from embryos more than 14 days old - which are the size of the period at the end of this sentence - and cannot be sold for research. We believe these limitations make for a sensible approach.

Proponents also point to the economic stimulus effect of Proposal 2.

Easing the limits on embryonic stem cell research will allow U-M and other institutions to retain and recruit scientists. That's crucial for a state that already faces a serious brain drain as the brightest and best look for opportunities elsewhere, states like Maryland, Illinois, New York and Connecticut that have widened the window for stem cell research.

We support this effort to remove the limitations that now exist under state law and pave the way for the new frontiers of medical science.
Proposal 2 deserves to pass.