

Lift state's ban on stem cell research

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While other states are pouring millions of dollars into attracting it, Michigan clings to a ban on embryonic stem cell research. The law keeps the state well back of the cutting edge in biomedical sciences.

Iowa just lifted its restrictions on stem cell research. Illinois is spending \$25 million a year of its tobacco settlement money on grants for such research. Voters in Missouri approved such research with strict oversight. In California, a court last month upheld the 2004 decision of voters to create a \$3-billion fund for stem cell projects.

Michigan, meantime, sits in league with Arkansas, Louisiana, Minnesota and the two Dakotas with an express ban. The state's "Life Sciences Corridor" linking medical and university research centers will never realize its potential as an economic engine with this restriction in place.

There is no state in the union with a greater need to diversify its economy. Biomedical science is one area of sure growth. Michigan is severely handicapped in the fierce competition for it with this ban in place.

In a recent statewide survey, 65% of Michigan voters said they'd support a ballot proposal to allow research using embryonic stem cells, which hold the promise of someday curing debilitating disease and replacing damaged or diseased organs.

There's no need to wait for a 2008 ballot proposal. The Legislature put the ban in place. It can and should remove it.