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Ficano venture aims to lure stem cell work to Wayne County

By: KATHLEEN GRAY

Wayne County Executive Robert Ficano said Thursday that county government will partner with Tech Town at Wayne State University to try to bring embryonic stem cell business to southeast Michigan.

The announcement at Ficano's State of the County address in Canton follows approval in November of a state ballot proposal easing restrictions on embryonic stem cell research.

Proponents say the research could produce solutions to medical mysteries and diseases.

Wayne's Stem Cell Commercialization Center will aid firms considering coming to Michigan for stem cell research and business.

It will provide access to lab space, seed money for start-up companies and information on tax incentives.

"What we're doing in Wayne County is trying to apply the glue to connect the dots for companies," said Deputy Wayne County Executive Azzam Elder, who noted the county could inject up to \$10 million for the business initiative.

Michigan is behind other states in stem cell research. California voters passed a \$3-billion bond proposal in 2004 to support embryonic stem cell research.

Until November, Michigan was one of five states with strict prohibitions on embryonic stem cell research.

Proposal 2, which passed 53%-47%, amended the state constitution to allow scientists in Michigan to use embryos left over from fertility treatments for research.