



GONGWER – 10.28 OPPONENTS WARN AGAINST STEM CELL BILLS

A package of bill imposing a variety of additional requirements on embryonic stem cell research in the state would violate the spirit of the constitutional amendment allowing such efforts and hurt those now underway in Michigan, the Senate Health Policy Committee was told by opponents on Wednesday.

But the chair of the committee, along with several members, said the bills ([SB 647](#) , [SB 648](#) , [SB 649](#) , [SB 650](#) , [SB 651](#) and [SB 652](#)) were needed to provide greater structure to stem cell research in the state while ensuring that public and private research operates on the same basis. And [Sen. Tom George](#) (R-Kalamazoo), the committee chair, urged opponents to propose changes and amendments to the bills.

But [Sen. Gilda Jacobs](#) (D-Huntington Woods) characterized the package as attempting to "cut off the legs" of the embryonic stem cell research effort in the state after the constitutional amendment approving the proposal was voted on by the public in November 2008.

The committee took testimony only on the bills, which were described by [Sen. Roger Kahn](#) (R-Saginaw Twp.), and the sponsor of the SB 649, as insuring that informed consent provisions were met in embryonic donations and stem cell research and that reasonable regulations were imposed.

Former House Speaker Rick Johnson, now a lobbyist representing CureMichigan, the group that led the effort to win approval of the ballot proposal, said his group could not support the bills as written. After offering to write the bills for the committee, he said the measures could send the wrong message to the researchers now working in the state. "I've seen some of the people doing this. The work is incredible," he said.

Graham Parker, a somatic stem cell researcher at Wayne State University (and, he pointed out, a warden of the Anglican Church of Canada) said some of the requirements in the bills were unworkable and scientifically impossible to implement. For example, a provision that individuals dealing with embryos be able to determine whether it has a greater than 50 percent chance of successfully implanting in a woman cannot be met, he said, because even the best invitro-fertilization clinics have no more than a 30 percent chance of success.

"We need America's best and brightest working on all avenues of stem cell research, and I believe America has the best and brightest," Mr. Parker said.

And Gary Smith, an embryologist at the University of Michigan, said there was no way he could assess an embryo's chance of successful implantation under the bill's requirements. He also said that the provisions are duplicitous and serve no public purpose.

Asked by [Sen. Bruce Patterson](#) (R-Canton) if there were any federal safeguards dealing with the credentials of individuals conducting private research, Cynthia Wilbanks of the University of Michigan said all stem cell research had to comply with federal Food and Drug Administration requirements. That caused Mr. Patterson to snap about where under the Tenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution the state gave that authority to the federal government.

He also said that he was "very, very concerned at the suggestion because jobs or investments are concerned we should abandon our ethical concerns to be sure people not be preyed upon" in the process of research.