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EMBRYONIC STEM CELL BILLS INTRODUCED IN HOUSE

Calling their legislation a "compromise," a group of Democratic lawmakers announced Thursday their introduction of [HB 4616](#), [HB 4617](#) and [HB 4618](#), which would make human cloning a 15-year felony and allow parents using in vitro fertilization to opt into a system in which their unused embryos would be used for stem cell research.

[Rep. Andy Meisner](#) (D-Ferndale), who has been leading the fight to allow embryonic stem cell lines derived in Michigan to be used for research - which is currently prohibited by law - said the "compromise" consists of requiring parents to give written informed consent and making sure that human cloning does not take place.

But he also acknowledged that Democrats made the so-called compromise without getting opponents of embryonic stem cell research on board all the way with the bills.

"There has been an unwillingness for them to sit down. We're trying to work in good faith," he said.

[Sen. Gretchen Whitmer](#) (D-East Lansing), who has introduced similar legislation ([SB 52](#)) said from a moral and economic aspect, allowing such research to move forward makes sense.

"How on God's green Earth does it promote life to throw embryos in the garbage?" she said.

But Ed Rivet, legislative director for Right to Life of Michigan, said even if the bills have been altered his organization is still unwilling to support them because they don't believe embryos should be used for research purposes. And he said proponents of the legislation were ignoring the fact that embryonic stem cell treatments have been shown to cause tumors.

During a press conference to announce the proposal, former Republican House Speaker Rick Johnson said he was supporting the bills because they would bring Michigan in line

with other Midwestern states that are creating both jobs and potential cures for diseases like Alzheimer's, Parkinson's and cancer. He said while a 501c-4 group has been formed, they are not looking at a ballot proposal on embryonic stem cell research yet.

But Danny Heumann, founder of the Daniel Heumann Fund for Spinal Cord Research, said while all legislative efforts should be exhausted, he was less optimistic the bills would win passage in both chambers and urged the public to coalesce around a ballot initiative he said would require \$20 million to be raised.

"We're going to make this issue happen," he said.

Lee Noll, president of BioFlow Technology, said his start-up company produces a bioreactor system that supports the long-term culture of stem cells, but that it will either have to relocate to a state with less restrictive laws or set-up a duplicate facility outside of Michigan.

"Both options cost the company more money and cost the state a significant number of potential jobs at a time when neither can afford this loss," Mr. Noll said.

And Cathy Coury, whose 13-year-old son Gabriel battles with juvenile diabetes, argued, "every path that we leave unexplored will not lead to a cure."

The House bills have been referred to the Judiciary Committee.

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