

Group pushes for state changes in stem cell laws

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A new nonprofit organization has been created to educate Michigan residents in hopes of prompting change in the state's restrictive stem cell laws.

Michigan Citizens for Stem Cell Research & Cures was launched Monday at two news conferences, including one in Detroit, and through a new Web site, www.stemcellresearchformichigan.com. [cqMichigan](#) law prohibits use of embryonic stem cells derived from in vitro fertilization procedures in the state.

Federal guidelines limit researchers who receive federal funding to 22 embryonic stem cell lines derived before August 2001.

Michigan is considered to have one of the most restrictive legal environments in the nation -- a reputation that poses serious obstacles to medical research and the hiring of top researchers. "Stem cell research will transform Michigan's future," said Irvin Reid, president of Wayne State University.

Efforts to change state law face serious challenges from people who oppose the use of embryonic stem cells because they see it as a destruction of human life at its earliest stages. They also argue that Michigan allows the use of adult stem cells, including those in umbilical cord blood.

But several speakers at the news briefing said the potential of adult stem cells is much more limited. They hope to educate citizens about the differences, so citizens can lobby for changes. As a nonprofit group, the organization itself must stick to education, not politics.

"Federal and state laws don't save a single human embryo from being discarded; they only delay medical research," said Dr. Sean Morrison, director of the University of Michigan's Center for Stem Cell Biology.

The Southfield-based coalition was formed with \$150,000 raised from private citizens, said Marcia Baum, executive director. Its advisory board includes Gov. Jennifer Granholm, U.S. Sen. Carl Levin, D-Mich., and U.S. Rep. Joe Schwarz, R-Battle Creek.

State Rep. Andrew Meisner, D-Ferndale, who is also on the board, has introduced legislation to allow researchers to use embryonic stem cells developed in Michigan.

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