

Good morning Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee.

My name is Laura Jackson. I am 18 years old and live with my family in Livonia, where I attend Schoolcraft Community College. I am here today with my parents, Daryl and Melody Jackson.

I learned a life lesson four years ago at age 14 I will never forget. I was trying out for high school cheerleading when my neck was broken during a fall. As a result I am a C-1, C-2 quadriplegic and ventilator dependent...much like Christopher Reeves.

After waking up in the hospital and not being able to move or breathe, I knew my life might never be the same. Lying in my hospital bed, the doctors came in and told me I was paralyzed from my neck down. They said I would never be able to move or breathe on my own again.

I began to cry and thought there had to be a cure; I couldn't stay like this forever.

My father and I started researching and looking for a cure, a treatment, anything that would improve my quality of life.

We had heard of stem cell research but never understood the significance of it or how it could help thousands or possibly millions of people with various diseases. Unfortunately, while learning about the unique promise of stem cells we also learned about the many restrictions that exist in the United States, and especially Michigan.

Knowing that there wasn't any hope in Michigan or even in the United States, we were forced to look in other countries.

We searched and searched and finally came across a surgery in China that was using adult stem cells. The surgery was showing significant improvements. Luckily, Dr. Huang was visiting Michigan soon. After meeting him and most of his Michigan patients, my parents decided getting the surgery would help me.

A year later, we flew to China. The flight was 20 hours long and uncomfortable. We waited a week and I had the 8-hour surgery. I was a little scared because the hospitals didn't have all of the amenities I needed.

But within a week after the surgery, I was finally able to get out of bed and I noticed a difference right away. I was able to breathe on my own for 15 minutes — that had never happened before. Before the surgery I tried to breathe on my own several times but would run out of breath in about thirty seconds and needed my ventilator.

After a year and a half of never being able to breath, 15 minutes was a relief. I also noticed much more movement in my neck and shoulders; it improved my quality of life.

When I arrived back home in Michigan, I started physical therapy about five days a week. I gained muscles in my neck and shoulders that I hadn't had since before my accident. I now had more independence; I didn't have to worry about running out of breath or about getting dizzy from my head falling. Something many people take for granted, like breathing, made me feel one step closer toward being myself again.

Still in physical therapy, and starting to hit a plateau, I wonder what will come next. I have prayed that some kind of research will be allowed in Michigan, but still nothing has happened.

I agree with those who say Michigan will need to strengthen its ban on human reproductive cloning. I disagree, however, with those who say embryonic stem cell research is not pro-life.

This research represents the true pro-life position because it could save human lives and eliminate human suffering.

Next year, a California company is going to begin trial on an embryonic stem cell treatment for people who have suffered spinal cord injuries. While the treatment is designed for recent spinal cord injuries, I can't help but think how different my life would be had this treatment been around when I had my accident.

Now — at the age of 18 — I am still hopeful that Michigan's laws on embryonic stem cell research will change in the near future. I continue to work hard at keeping a healthy body. When there finally is a cure, I will be ready. I'm optimistic and looking forward to the day I will be able to get myself dressed, brush my own teeth, and take walks with my family.

My hope is the Michigan Legislature will work together to help me realize my dreams by passing stem cell research legislation that makes treatments for people in my condition possible.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak with you today.