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New Jersey, North Carolina, Rhode Island Take Actions On Embryonic Stem Cell Research, Fertility Treatment Measures

The following highlights recent state actions on human embryonic stem cell research and fertility treatment-related legislation.

Embryonic Stem Cell Research

- **New Jersey:** Gov. Jon Corzine (D) on Thursday signed a bill that authorizes a Nov. 6 referendum asking voters to approve borrowing \$450 million over 10 years to fund stem cell research in the state, the Newark Star-Ledger reports (Margolin, Newark Star-Ledger, 7/27). The Assembly in June voted 50-27 and the Senate 31-3 to approve the legislation. If approved by voters, the funds would be used to award grants to institutions -- including colleges, universities, and state and local government agencies -- that conduct research on both adult and embryonic stem cells and umbilical cord blood, according to Rep. Neil Cohen (D). Corzine last year signed a measure into law that authorizes \$270 million in state funds for the expansion of embryonic stem cell research and facilities in the state (Kaiser Daily Women's Health Policy Report, 7/27). According to the AP/Philadelphia Inquirer, some abortion-rights opponents oppose the referendum because it involves destroying human embryos, while supporters of the proposal say the research could advance medical treatments and attract researchers to the state. Borrowing for stem cell research could increase the state's debt by as much as \$37 million annually, according to a nonpartisan legislative analysis (Hester, AP/Philadelphia Inquirer, 7/26). "This is an investment that has a very clear payback," Corzine said at a signing ceremony at the Kessler Institute for Rehabilitation in West Orange, N.J. Marie Tasy, executive director of New Jersey Right to Life, said her group might decide to challenge the referendum if it determines the ballot language to be misleading. A recent Quinnipiac University poll found 49% of state voters supported the referendum and 39% opposed it (Gold, AP/Philadelphia Daily News, 7/26).
- **North Carolina:** The House Appropriations Committee on Thursday voted 45-35 to approve a bill (HB 1837) that would permit stem cell research using embryos created during in vitro fertilization treatments that otherwise would be destroyed, the AP/Greensboro News & Record reports (Robertson, AP/Greensboro News & Record, 7/26). The committee on Wednesday voted to pass an amendment to the bill that removed \$10 million in funding for the research, the Raleigh News & Observer reports. The amended version would not allocate any funds to embryonic stem cell research, but it would require a state commission to establish guidelines for researchers who want to use state funds for research using embryonic stem cells. Rep. Earl Jones (D), sponsor of the measure, said that even without funding, the amended bill has value because the state could provide money for embryonic stem cell research in the future, or state residents could approve a bond measure to fund such research. Rep. Paul Stam (R) said he would continue to oppose the legislation because it involves research using embryos (Bonner, Raleigh News & Observer, 7/26).

Fertility Treatments

- **Rhode Island:** Gov. Don Carcieri (R) last week vetoed legislation (H 5251 Substitute A) that would have required health insurers to extend their coverage of infertility diagnosis and treatment to single women, the Providence Journal reports. Current law requires insurers to cover 80% of infertility treatments for married women and, regardless of the patient's age, number of treatments or total treatment cost. The General Assembly earlier this year passed the law requiring that women up to age 42 be covered for the treatments, and it modified the definition of infertility to include women unable to sustain a pregnancy for a period of one year. The legislation to extend the requirements to cover unmarried women passed the General Assembly and was sent to Carcieri earlier this month. Carcieri in his veto statement said, "As a matter of public policy, the state should be encouraging the birth of children to two-parent families, not the reverse. By removing the marriage requirement, the legislation forces health insurance companies to subsidize out-of-wedlock births." He added, "Any further tinkering with this benefit is unnecessary and unwarranted, and allows for even further creeping of cost in our health care system." Rep. Edith Ajello (D) said, "There are people living in commitment relationships, whether they are heterosexual or lesbian, who also provide a very good home life for children," adding, "I don't think the state should be getting involved with who could be parents and who cannot. That's very dangerous" (Vernon-Sparks, Providence Journal, 7/20).

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