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National Council of Jewish Women
Greater Detroit Section

MICHIGAN HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE HOUSE BILLS 4616, 4617 AND 4618

My name is Fern Ettinger, and I am here on behalf of National Council of Jewish Women. We are a volunteer organization with over 90,000 members that has been at the forefront of social change for over a century. Inspired by Jewish values we work through programs of research, education, advocacy and community service to improve the quality of life for women, children and families and strive to ensure individual rights and freedoms for all.

We are supporting legislation to remove Michigan's restrictions on embryonic stem cell research, including the SCNT (Somatic Cell Nuclear Transfer) procedure, and also increase penalties for researchers who engage in human, "reproductive cloning."

Human embryonic stem cells have demonstrated the capacity to develop into healthy organ tissue that could potentially replace tissue destroyed by aging or disease. Stem cell research, therefore, holds the promise of leading to treatments or cures for more than 100 million Americans suffering from diseases such as diabetes, Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, ALS, heart disease, spinal cord injury and cancer.

Some forms of stem cell therapy have been around – and widely used – for decades. For example, bone marrow transplants are used to treat sickle cell anemia. The stem cells in the donated bone marrow regenerate the patient's blood and immune system.

There are some people who oppose embryonic stem cell research because it involves the destruction of human embryos. In fact, the human embryos that are being used are mostly discarded by fertility clinics and would otherwise be destroyed. There are no identifying features to these cells--not even a hint of a nervous system.

Stem cell research is widely supported in the Jewish community. The Orthodox, Conservative, Reconstructionist, and Reform movements all released statements endorsing stem cell research.

We are urging you to vote to allow Michigan's research communities to explore the vast areas of stem cell research and bring Michigan to the forefront of medical research and technology.

Thank you.

Fern Ettinger
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