

Budget proposes research fund

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A public benefit corporation to support stem cell research and development activities across the state would be formed if Gov. Eliot Spitzer gets his way.

Research universities, including the University of Rochester, have been urging its formation for more than a year.

Spitzer has proposed creating the New York State Stem Cell and Innovation Fund Corp. with \$100 million in state funds and is asking voters to approve a \$1.5 billion bond act to fund stem cell and other life sciences and emerging technologies.

Universities say they urgently need funding for stem cell and other research to retain scientists who might otherwise be lured to states that are developing public sources of funding. California has established a \$3 billion fund but has not put programs in place due to pending litigation from opponents of stem cell research.

UR President Joel Seligman said the governor's proposal would put New York in the lead in stem cell research and scientific innovation.

"The money is absolutely vital to saving lives and advancing our economy," Seligman said.

A commitment in the budget means New York could see resources available in months, rather than years, which California faced in legal challenges after a referendum on support for such research, Seligman said. It would move the state forward on emerging technologies, including fuel cells and nanotechnology, he added.

Stem cell research cuts across a number of projects at the University of Rochester Medical Center. Scientists in 18 labs with \$45 million in research funding are working in programs in neurological disease, cancer and orthopedics that touch on stem cell research, a URMCM spokesman said.

The bill proposed by Spitzer would let the Stem Cell and Innovation Fund Corp. provide grants and loans to support research that would promote economic growth by advancing discoveries toward commercial applications, budget documents state. No funds would be used for human reproductive cloning, documents state.

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