

Bill supports cell research

By [JULIE BAKER](#)

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Rep. Mark Meadows, D-East Lansing, has helped propose a bill to extend scientific research on embryonic stem cells in Michigan and increase the punishment for those who violate the current restrictions.

The bill would amend constraints placed on research facilities — allowing scientists to potentially use stem cell research to develop ideas or cures for diseases. Arthritis, multiple sclerosis, spinal cord injuries and Parkinson's disease are just some of the conditions the research could benefit, Meadows said.

Encouraging more research in Michigan also could have an effect on the economy, as the state currently has some of the most rigid restrictions in the U.S., Meadows said.

"We're losing some of the top scientists in the state because embryonic stem cell research is prohibited and restricted in the state," he said. "The funds to fund research are going to different states. It's a huge economic issue in terms of people and how we can help people."

Meadows said he hopes lifting restrictions will open a research corridor between MSU, the University of Michigan and Wayne State University comparable to the Research Triangle of North Carolina, which consists of the area's three major research universities — the University of North Carolina, Duke University and North Carolina State University. The triangle conducts more than \$600 million in research each year.

But opponents to the bill say cloning cells is unethical.

After scientists use stem cells to create the cloned embryo, they wait for them to grow and destroy them after they are used, said Ed Rivit, the legislative director for Right to Life of Michigan.

"This bill opens Michigan law up to the destruction of human embryos for research since you cannot do research without destroying what you have created," Rivit said.

The bill also could open the door to human cloning, he said.

But Meadows doesn't think Rivit's argument is valid.

"I don't want to demean their position because I know they believe strongly in it, but it's fantasy, it's science fiction," he said. "The bill prohibits anyone doing that. It's directed toward cells, not replacing people with some clone."

The proposed bill would raise the punishment for not abiding research laws from 10-15 years in prison and a fine of up to \$10 million.

The bill still protects the public against misuse — the cells used are those that are about to be discarded, Meadows said.

Consistent with the current bill, research facilities would not be able to buy cells.

"The underscored view here is that (human cloning) is a very, very bad thing," Meadows said. "It is not tolerated or permitted."