

Editorial

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Free Michigan researchers to pursue cures

New legislation would broaden stem cell research opportunities

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Some Democratic lawmakers in the state House of Representatives have revived legislation to allow embryonic stem cell research in Michigan. The bills renew a necessary debate. Embryonic stem cell research should be allowed in this state.

Under current law, Michigan has some of the toughest restrictions on embryonic stem cell research in the country. Yet the state is attempting to position itself as a site for biomedical research as one way out of its economic freefall.

Opponents say researchers should focus on adult stem cell research, but scientists in the field say embryonic cells provide the most hope for medical breakthroughs in spinal cord injury, diabetes and other maladies.

Stem cell biologist Sean Morrison of the University of Michigan noted to The News last year that it is legal for fertility clinics to discard human embryos, but not to use them for research that could cure disease and injury. If the goal is to protect human embryos, the fact that they can simply be discarded makes the research ban a fruitless exercise.

It makes no sense and is damaging to the state's efforts to make use of its research assets at Michigan, Michigan State, Wayne State, all of which have medical and biological research programs, as well as the Van Andel medical research center near Grand Rapids.

Universities and research institutes in other states are moving ahead with projects that would put Michigan doctors in jail.

State Rep. Andy Meisner, D-Ferndale, and some of his colleagues are backing new legislation in the House that would deal with the topic more rationally. People are justifiably worried about cloning. So Meisner has increased the penalty for cloning to deter it while encouraging embryonic stem cell research.

Pointless laws on embryonic research are helping make Michigan a scientific backwater in this area of medical investigation. That ought to change.