



State Embryonic Stem Cell Research Legislation Introduced

Reporter: Lauren Zakalik



Forty-year-old Danny Heumann is a T6 paraplegic, his lower half paralyzed at 18 years old from a car crash.

"I was put in this wheelchair for a purpose," he says.

That purpose is to advocate for embryonic stem cell research, which Heumann says could potentially fix his spinal cord injury. He joined state Democrats at the Capitol Thursday to introduce legislation that would lift Michigan's embryonic stem cell research restrictions.

"Every day that goes by in Michigan with the current restrictions in place is another day where hundreds of thousands of Michigan citizens are deprived of potentially life-saving cures and treatments," says bill co-sponsor Rep. Andy Meisner (D-Berkley).

Spinal cord injuries, Parkinson's disease and Alzheimer's are just a few of the ailments the research stands to help. The bill would require informed, written consent from donors to use their embryos for research.

"Right now," Meisner says, "we have a de facto ban on embryonic research, so if you do it, you go to jail." Violators also face \$10 million in fees for breaking the laws.

For good reason, says Michigan's Right To Life legislative director Ed Rivet. The bill would increase penalties for human cloning, but Rivet isn't sold that approving this bill wouldn't lead to cloning, which he considers unethical. He points to other more ethical and successful alternatives.

"Adult stem cells or amniotic stem cells or umbilical stem cells are showing the results," Rivet says.

Meisner introduced similar legislation last year but it didn't make it out of chamber. But supporters of the bill say if that happens again, they want to put it on a ballot and let Michigan voters decide.

"I want to find the \$20 million for a ballot initiative," Heumann says.

A battle, he adds, he's strong enough to fight.