

People of Faith for Stem Cell Research
A Petition Addressed to President Bush
(www.pfaith.org)

Dear President George W. Bush,

As men and women of religious faith, we request that you expand the current federal funding policy regarding stem cell research.

Embryonic stem cell research holds promise for alleviating the suffering and saving the lives of more than 100 million Americans. These Americans are afflicted by diseases and injuries such as juvenile diabetes, Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, multiple sclerosis, Lou Gehrig's Disease, heart disease, spinal cord injury, and cancer. Many of us have these illnesses ourselves, or are family, friends, and caregivers of people who are ill, and so we too are personally affected. Our petition to you is in keeping with our nation's ideals of compassion and mutual aid.

Today, nearly three years after the current Administration banned federal funding for research on all new embryonic stem cell lines, it is clear that this policy needs to be reassessed. When the policy was announced on August 9, 2001, the Administration assumed that more than 60 embryonic stem cell lines were available for research. Today, estimates from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) have reduced that number to 19, far fewer than are needed to advance the research in an effective way.

The scientific community in the United States -- including NIH Director Elias Zerhouni -- agrees that access to additional stem cell lines can help us achieve this aim. Please take into account as well the recent bi-partisan support given to this humane cause by members of both the House and the Senate.

In fact, this research is endorsed by people of all political perspectives and all faiths. Our religious traditions teach an obligation to pursue research that promotes healing and health. This duty is consistent with the principle of full respect for the dignity of human life.

Mr. President, now is the time to update the current policy. For indeed, this really is a race against time. In the past three years, more than 4 million Americans -- children and teenagers as well as adults -- have died from diseases that embryonic stem cells have the potential to treat.

New stem cell lines can be derived from excess frozen embryos being stored in fertility clinics. In vitro fertilization (IVF) develops embryos that are in excess of those needed for the procedure that enables infertile couples to have children. It is estimated that more than 400,000 of these IVF embryos are currently being stored in fertility clinics across the country. Most of them are slated to be destroyed -- they could instead (with informed consent of the couple) serve the therapeutic aims of medical research.

The problem is that the limitation placed by your Administration permits new stem cell lines to be used only by those few researchers who do not rely upon government grants. Mr. President, let's change this situation!

We recognize and appreciate your desire to help the millions of Americans suffering from severe illnesses. **We the undersigned urge you to lift the current federal funding restriction so that scientists can explore the full potential of this promising research.**

Sincerely,

(PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY.)

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