

# MIRS News

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## RTL Looks to Fill In 'Gray Area' On Stem Cell Proposal

Right to Life (RTL) of Michigan and a bipartisan group of lawmakers led by Sen. Tom **GEORGE** (R-Texas Twp.) are trumpeting a six-bill package designed to "fill-in the gaps" of the pro-embryonic stem cell research ballot proposal that passed last November.

But supporters of what was known as "Proposal 2" smell a rat.

Known as the "Embryo Research and Fertility Clinic Transparency Act," the bills make it clear that no embryos could be bought or sold for anything of value. It would set civil fines for researchers who use embryos that are older than 14 days of age and would ban the creation of human-animal hybrids.

The legislation also would require researchers and fertility clinics to file an annual report with the Department of Community Health to "ensure transparency," as well as to make sure the parents of the donated embryos truly gave their consent before any experiments were conducted.

"We're trying to get rid of ambiguities," George said. "This is not an attempt to undo Proposal 2. We can't do that. It's in the Constitution. It's the piecework around it."

Sens. Dennis **OLSHOVE** (D-Warren), Jim **BARCIA** (D-Bay City), Mark **JANSEN** (R-Cutlerville), Jud **GILBERT** (R-Algonac) and Roger **KAHN** (R-Saginaw) joined George in sponsoring bills in the package.

RTL's Ed **RIVET** said the purpose of the legislation is not to impose government regulation, but to add transparency. There are currently no federal or Michigan laws that govern the research and no procedures in place for enforcing violations of Proposal 2, he said.

"For the first time in Michigan history, a population of human beings will be classified as 'research material' and destroyed for their parts," Rivet said. "Without setting reasonable policies in place, we face a wide-open field with great potential for abuse."

George said he hopes the bills are referred to the Senate Health Policy Committee, which he chairs. If so, he said the plan is not to take them up until the fall, so the research universities and other interested parties have a chance to look at them.

Proposal 2 of 2008 opened the door for more embryonic stem cell research in Michigan. It was opposed by RTL and the Michigan Catholic Conference, but supported by the University of Michigan and researchers who see this type of research as the possible future of medicine.

One of the chief architects of the embryonic stem cell research effort said he believes George wants to revisit the issue to help promote his bid for governor.

Former House Speaker Rick **JOHNSON** said RTL may want to "gut" the law and George will use the legislative debate to attract RTL voters in the Republican primary for governor.

Johnson said he thought it was interesting that George made emotional pleas during the 2008 campaign that if Proposal 2 were adopted, you "couldn't do regulation" to change the law, but now he wants to do just that.

"I just saw the bill 20 minutes ago on my Blackberry," Johnson said. He said if there are areas "that we can cooperate, we will," but he remains skeptical of George's and Rivet's motives.

Former U.S. Rep. Joe **SCHWARZ**, a physician and Chair of the pro-Proposal 2 group Cure Michigan, said the bills could kill jobs in life sciences. He argued that the regulation over stem cell research was very strict and called the bills a "canard."

"One of the oldest legislative ploys known is if a bill or constitutional amendment passes that you disagree with, immediately throw up regulatory barriers in front of it. It's highly irrational, but used nonetheless," Schwarz said. "Right to Life will stop at nothing to hamstring Proposal 2 and embryonic stem cell research in Michigan. The sad thing is they are hamstringing effective treatments and cures for maladies like juvenile diabetes.

"As the state is drifting to severe fiscal difficulty, facing a \$1.8 billion deficit in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2010 budget, for the Legislature to spend a minute on anything else would be a mistake," he added. "Spending any time whatsoever on bills promulgating yet another social engineering scheme doesn't make any sense whatsoever."

*(Contributed by Senior Capital Correspondent Tim **SKUBICK**.)*