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September 1, 2010

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker of the House of Representatives  
H-232 Capitol Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Harry Reid  
Senate Majority Leader  
S-221 Capitol Building  
Washington, DC, 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Majority Leader Reid,

I write to you on behalf of the Coalition for the Life Sciences (CLS). On Monday, August 23, 2010, Federal District Court Judge Royce Lamberth granted a preliminary injunction blocking President Obama’s 2009 executive order expanding funding for human embryonic stem cell (ESC) research. That executive order did not allow funding for the generation of human ESC lines but it did allow funding of research using stem cells derived, using non-federal funding, from surplus embryos at fertility clinics that would otherwise be discarded. That work, filled with great promise, has now been stopped at National Institutes of Health (NIH) and at medical schools, universities, and research centers across the U.S. The CLS urges Congress to quickly and decisively pass legislation that ensures continued federal funding to support research on stem cells derived from human embryos.

At the very crux of the matter, and the issue that requires Congress’s swift action, is Judge Lamberth’s ruling that the Dickey-Wicker amendment signals the ‘unambiguous’ intent of Congress to prohibit the expenditure of federal funds on research in which a human embryo or embryos are destroyed. At least two Congresses (one Democrat and one Republican-controlled) and three Presidential Administrations (Clinton, Bush, and Obama) saw no contradiction between Dickey-Wicker and federal funding for ESC research. In 1999, a Clinton Administration lawyer, Harriett S. Rabb, argued that taxpayers could finance experiments on stem cell colonies that had already been cultivated with private money. President Bush’s Domestic Policy Advisor Jay Lefkowitz also reviewed the Dickey-Wicker Amendment as it relates to ESC research. He and a team of lawyers agreed that such research would not violate the intent of the amendment. President Bush therefore adopted this reasoning, with restrictions; President Obama lifted those restrictions—maintaining strict ethical guidelines that must be followed in order to engage in this research.

Amidst this legal sparring, those who stand to be truly injured by this ruling are patients and their families who desperately need therapies and cures for disease, those who suffer daily from chronic and fatal disorders. This research, while still in its infancy, was moving forward

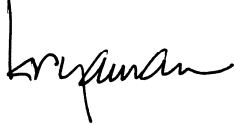
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with great momentum. For example, scientists were ready to test ESCs in patients with a progressive form of blindness and others with devastating spinal cord injuries. Importantly, ESCs also provide scientists with uniquely powerful tools to study the molecular mechanisms of lung ailments, diabetes, Parkinson's disease, and many other life-threatening diseases. Finding the precise cause of diseases offers the most direct route to treatments and cures. As a result of this ruling, hundreds of studies aimed at defining disease mechanisms have been halted.

As researchers who depend heavily on federal funds for our work—including research on ESCs—we enter our labs every day with the hope that we will uncover causes, discover new treatments and cures for disease. ESC lines are bright beacons for that research. As responsible scientists and citizens, we feel strongly that our government needs to lead the effort on this research. Federal funding ensures that this research receives full public scrutiny and that the public interest is protected. To these ends, the CLS urges swift and decisive legislative action to ensure that this vital research continues.

Sincerely,



Keith R. Yamamoto  
Chair, Coalition for the Life Sciences  
Professor, Cellular and Molecular Pharmacology  
Executive Vice Dean, UCSF School of Medicine

Cc: Members of the House of Representatives  
Members of the U.S. Senate