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## Senate passes bill to restrict embryonic research

*KAREN BOUFFARD**Detroit News Lansing Bureau*

*Lansing* -- Stem cell research proponents slammed the Senate's passage of bills -- supported by anti-abortion groups -- that they say would unconstitutionally restrict embryonic research in the state.

The bills, passed Wednesday, prohibit the sale or purchase of human eggs and would require research facilities, including universities, to file annual reports listing how many human embryos they have stored and other data. The legislation includes civil fines of up to \$5,000, and would make some violations felonies punishable by up to a year in prison.

Supporters in the Republican-led Senate said regulations are needed to clarify vague areas of Proposal 2, the constitutional amendment voters approved in 2008 that expands use of human embryos for any research permitted under federal law.

"I'd like to know how many embryos the University of Michigan has stored. Is it thousands, or three?" said Sen. Tom George, R-Kalamazoo, a sponsor of the package. "It's an after-the-fact report -- it does not discourage, obstruct or restrict research."

The bills head to the House where they face opposition from the Democratic majority.

"The Senate bills appear to be political in nature and ignore both the will of the people as well as the state's Constitution," House Speaker Andy Dillon said in a statement.

The bills are opposed by Michigan universities and other proponents of stem cell research, which they say holds the promise of cures for many diseases, while boosting economic development in Michigan's burgeoning stem cell research industry.

"These bills would block medical research in Michigan that is legal throughout the rest of the country," said Sean Morrison, director of the University of Michigan Center for Stem Cell Biology.

The Michigan Catholic Conference supports the bills.

"(The legislation) ensures those who conduct human embryo research in this state, either within public institutions or at private companies, are doing so in a legal and transparent manner," said Paul Long, Michigan Catholic Conference Vice President for Public Policy.

Pro-life Republican Sen. Bruce Patterson of Canton joined Democrats in opposing the package. He said he believes the bills are unconstitutional because the amendment approved by voters allows stem cell research within the same limits allowed by federal law.

Patterson said the amendment prohibits the Legislature from enacting more restrictive parameters.

Gov. Jennifer Granholm has targeted growth in the life sciences sector as part of Michigan's strategy to diversify its economy and create jobs.

Sen. Liz Brater, D-Ann Arbor, said the laws, if passed, would have grave economic impact on the state's emerging biotechnology industry. Millions in investments poured into the state following passage of Proposal 2, she said.

"We're erecting more barriers to the best and brightest, and shackling our world class universities," Brater said.

[kbouffard@detnews.com](mailto:kbouffard@detnews.com)">[kbouffard@detnews.com](mailto:kbouffard@detnews.com) (517) 371-3660

## Additional Facts

Michigan's law

Voters in 2008 approved an amendment to the state Constitution to allow human embryo and human embryonic stem cell research in Michigan. The amendment:

- Expands use of human embryos for any research permitted under federal law.
- Allows use of embryos provided they are created for fertility treatment purposes; are not suitable for implantation or are in excess of clinical needs; would be discarded unless used for research; and were donated by the person seeking fertility treatment.
- Says stem cells cannot be taken from human embryos more than 14 days after cell division begins.
- Prohibits any person from selling or purchasing human embryos for stem cell research.
- Prohibits state and local laws that prevent, restrict or discourage stem cell research, future therapies and cures.

Source: Detroit News research

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