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LEGISLATIVE TESTIMONY

To: Members of the Joint Committee on Economic Development and Emerging Technologies
From: Daniel Avila, Esq., Associate Director for Policy & Research
Re: Senate Bill 151, An Act Clarifying Chapter 111L-Biotechnology
Date: April 12, 2011

The Massachusetts Catholic Conference (“Conference”) respectfully submits this testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 151, “An Act Clarifying Chapter 111L-Biotechnology.”

The legislation would, among other changes, expand current law authorizing research in the Commonwealth that destroys human embryos by a) allowing embryos created by fertilization methods to be sacrificed for destructive research (SB 151, Section 5), b) removing existing restrictions in the law against offering financial inducements for egg donation (SB 151, Sections 2-5), and c) removing the law’s encouragement of stem cell research that does not involve the destruction of embryos (SB 151, Section 1).¹

The Roman Catholic Church joins the United Nations in opposing the violation of human rights that occurs when human embryos are destroyed for research purposes and when women are exploited in order to acquire their eggs for use in such research through methods posing medical risks.²

Thus the Massachusetts Catholic Bishops and the Conference support the repeal of Chapter 111L except those provisions that encourage research involving adult stem cells and other curative experiments that do not involve the intentional taking of human life.³ The current law conflicts with the common good to the extent that it creates an arbitrary line between unprotected and protected human embryos.

For example, the current law requires the destruction of human lives created in the laboratory before they reach fourteen days in their development,⁴ even though all embryos, whatever their means of creation, are human beings destined by their nature to grow into mature individuals.⁵

¹ Current law calls for the active fostering of life sciences research involving placental and umbilical cord cells and adult stem cells along with research involving embryonic stem cells. M.G.L. Chap. 111L §1(c). Section 1 of Senate Bill 151 would remove the life-affirming references from the listing of services to be actively fostered, still to include destructive methods, and add another sentence stating merely that life-affirming research will not be prohibited.

² See United Nations Declaration on Human Cloning (March 8, 2005) available at <http://www.nrlc.org/UN/UN-GADeclarationHumanCloning.pdf>; see also Statement of Judy Norsigian, Executive Director, Our Bodies, Ourselves, before the Congressional Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy and Human Resources (March 7, 2006) (detailing risks to women from egg extraction), available at <http://www.handsoffourovaries.com/pdfs/norsigiantestimony.pdf>.

³ See, e.g., M.G.L. Chap. 111L §1(c).

⁴ See M.G.L. Chap. 111L §2 (defining “donated to research” and stating that researchers “shall not transfer the pre-implantation embryo to a uterus or uterine-like environment or nurture the pre-implantation embryo beyond 14 days of development”).

Recent scientific developments allow scientists to create regenerative cells (called induced pluripotent stem cells) and to find cures without needing or destroying embryos.⁶ Rather than expanding destructive research and removing protections for women, the Commonwealth should be promoting life-affirming alternatives in a manner that respects everyone's human dignity.

For these reasons, the Conference urges the Committee to give Senate Bill 151an unfavorable report recommending that the bill ought not pass.

The Massachusetts Catholic Conference is the public policy office of the Roman Catholic Bishops in the Commonwealth, representing the Archdiocese of Boston and the Dioceses of Fall River, Springfield, and Worcester.

⁵ For example, "Human cloning, therefore, is the asexual production of a new human organism that is, at all stages of development, genetically virtually identical to a currently existing or previously existing human being." President's Council on Bioethics, *Frequently Asked Questions About Human Cloning and the Council's Report on Human Cloning and Human Dignity: An Ethical Inquiry*, available online at http://bioethics.georgetown.edu/pcbe/topics/cloning_faq.html.

⁶ See Nat'l Institutes of Health, Stem Cell Basics: What Are Induced Pluripotent Stem Cells?, available at <http://stemcells.nih.gov/info/basics/basics10.asp>.