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**LEGISLATIVE TESTIMONY**

To: Members of the Joint Committee on Public Health  
From: Edward F. Saunders, Jr., Esq., Executive Director  
Re: House 2132, “An Act Relative to Reprogrammed Human Skin Cells for Embryonic Stem Cell Research”  
Date: January 19, 2010

The Massachusetts Catholic Conference (“Conference”) respectfully submits this testimony in support of House 2132, “An Act Relative to Reprogrammed Human Skin Cells for Embryonic Stem Cell Research.”

House 2132 would amend Massachusetts law governing scientific and medical research involving the use of human stem cells by:

1. prohibiting the creation, experimental use, and destruction of human embryos for research purposes;
2. authorizing research involving the use of adult stem cells obtained from reprogrammed skin cells in a manner that does not harm human life;
3. removing current statutory authorization to individuals to donate their gametes to embryonic stem cell researchers; and
4. preventing the transfer of “abandoned” embryos created through in vitro fertilization for embryonic stem cell research.

Since the passage of the Act Enhancing Regenerative Medicine in the Commonwealth (2005 Mass. Acts 27), endorsing research involving the destruction of human embryonic life, remarkable scientific advances have occurred using adult stem cells that can be obtained without harming human embryos.

Scientists in Japan and Wisconsin reported in 2007 revolutionary success in using a reprogramming process to enable adult stem cells to act like embryonic stem cells in their capacity to be converted into other types of cells. See Colin Nickerson, *Studies Cite New Process For Stem Cells: Teams Avoid Ethical Issues Tied to Embryos*, Boston Globe, June 7, 2007.<sup>1</sup> In October of 2009, ten of the first fourteen research grants awarded by the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine involved proposals employing non-embryonic stem cell methods, a development that, the New York Times reported, “represented a departure from the program’s original mission” of promoting embryonic stem cells, thus bolstering “one argument by opponents of embryonic stem cell work: that [embryonic stem] cells are not needed because

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<sup>1</sup> Available at [http://www.boston.com/yourlife/health/diseases/articles/2007/06/07/studies\\_cite\\_new\\_process\\_for\\_stem\\_cells/](http://www.boston.com/yourlife/health/diseases/articles/2007/06/07/studies_cite_new_process_for_stem_cells/).

treatment using adult cells are closer to fruition.” Andrew Pollack, *California Awards Grants for Research Projects in Nonembryonic Stem Cells*, N.Y. Times, Oct. 28, 2009.<sup>2</sup>

In Massachusetts researchers are achieving even more remarkable success with adult stem cells. For example, scientists at the Whitehead Institute and MIT have developed cells with embryonic stem cell-like capacities, again without using human embryos, and converted these cells into the neurons that are lost in patients with Parkinson’s Disease, thus “offer[ing] a powerful new way to study the disease.” *Virus-Free Embryonic-Like Stem Cells from Skin of Parkinson’s Patients*, redOrbit.com, Mar. 6, 2009.<sup>3</sup> Using a technique that directly converts skin cells into insulin producing cells needed to treat juvenile diabetes, scientists at Harvard Medical School and Children’s Hospital in Boston found the process “easier than one might have thought,” especially in comparison with the difficulties associated with working with embryonic stem cells. Maggie Fox, *Researchers Turn Living Cells Into Insulin Producers*, Reuters.com, Aug. 27, 2008.<sup>4</sup>

Ian Wilmut, who pioneered animal cloning with the production of Dolly the sheep and who was granted a license in Britain to develop human cloning methods, decided in 2007 to abandon his human cloning and embryonic stem cell experiments altogether because of the advances in adult stem cell research, which he described as “extremely exciting and astonishing” as well as “easier to accept socially.” *Professor Who Created Dolly the Sheep to Abandon Cloning*, Guardian.co.uk, Nov. 17, 2007.<sup>5</sup>

For pragmatic as well as moral reasons, the legislative endorsement of research that involves the cloning and destruction of human embryos, that unnecessarily invites controversy, and that diverts resources from effective, ethical and universally approved alternatives for finding cures, should be rescinded. House 2132 would restore the Commonwealth’s fundamental regard for the protection of vulnerable human life without sacrificing the value of promoting life-saving research.

For these reasons, the Conference urges the Committee to give House 2132 a favorable report recommending the bill’s passage.

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.

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<sup>2</sup> Available at [http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/29/health/research/29stem.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/29/health/research/29stem.html?_r=1).

<sup>3</sup> Available at [http://www.redorbit.com/news/health/1650428/virusfree\\_embryoniclike\\_stem\\_cells\\_from\\_skin\\_of\\_parkinsons\\_patients/index.html](http://www.redorbit.com/news/health/1650428/virusfree_embryoniclike_stem_cells_from_skin_of_parkinsons_patients/index.html).

<sup>4</sup> Available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSN2744471020080827>.

<sup>5</sup> Available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/science/2007/nov/17/stemcells>.