

Pro-Life Wisconsin



Defending them all...

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State Legislature Passes Comprehensive Human Cloning Ban

By Matt Sande, Pro-Life Wisconsin Director of Legislative Affairs

The Wisconsin State Senate recently passed a bill that would place a complete ban on human cloning in our state. Having already passed the State Assembly, the measure now moves to the Governor's desk. Regrettably, Governor Doyle has vowed to veto the bill.

Assembly Bill 499, authored by Representative Steve Kestell (R-Elkhart Lake) and Senator Joe Leibham (R-Sheboygan), would outlaw human cloning. Cloning perverts God's design for creating new life. In cloning, a child is not created; a new life is simply manufactured. In short, cloning is a perverse mode of generating a human life that affronts the dignity, equality and freedom of that human life at its very beginning. Before discussing the ethical and policy issues surrounding the creation of human embryos through cloning, we must answer the *scientific* question of what these early human embryos are. *When does human life begin?* Human embryologists – the real scientific experts in the area of human development – authoritatively conclude that a human embryo is a human being, immediately beginning at fertilization or cloning. At no other logical or scientifically sound point can we say that a human life begins. The embryo is not an organ or some pre-human cellular glob without purpose or plan. Embryologists categorically reject the notion of a “pre-embryo” or some form of evolving “human-being-on-the-way.” From its inception, the human embryo contains its entire genetic makeup and thus is a unique, individual member of the human species.

Assembly Bill 499, entitled the Comprehensive Human Cloning Ban, bans somatic cell nuclear transfer, or SCNT, the scientific name for the human cloning procedure. It thereby bans so-called “reproductive cloning,” where a cloned human embryo is brought to birth, and so-called “therapeutic cloning,” where a cloned human embryo is experimented upon and killed in the name of scientific progress. The terminology is, of course, problematic because it implies that there is a difference between “reproductive” and “therapeutic” cloning. But the distinction between the two is illusory, and it is intentionally misleading. Both involve the reproduction of a fully human life – the creation of a cloned human embryo. Once the nucleus of a somatic (body) cell is injected into an empty egg and stimulated to begin development, it is a cloned human embryo. The difference lies in the intended use of that human embryo – whether it is to be implanted in the womb and brought to birth (reproductive cloning) or whether it is to be eviscerated by extracting its stem cells (therapeutic cloning). Either intention is repugnant, in that the dignity and individuality of the human person is thoroughly disregarded.

The primary argument against “reproductive” cloning is straightforward and widely shared – it's dangerous. Cloning is an assault on human life, both physically and psychologically. It carries “massive risks of producing unhealthy, abnormal and malformed children,” according to Dr. Leon Kass, chairman of the President's Council on Bioethics. Most cloned sheep embryos have died soon after being produced (during gestation or soon after birth) due to congenital disorders. Producing a child of known genetic makeup implies conditional parental acceptance, which is harmful to a child's social and psychological development.

The primary argument against “therapeutic” cloning is also straightforward but less widely shared – it intentionally kills another human being. Supporters of “therapeutic” cloning often say that they support cloning only to “produce stem cells,” evading the fact that they must create and then destroy fully human embryos to produce those stem cells. “Therapeutic cloning” is really just the opposite, because it involves nontherapeutic experiments on a defenseless human being – experiments that kill the human being solely for the benefit of others.

Amendments to AB 499 were offered in both houses that would have banned only “reproductive cloning” while permitting “therapeutic cloning.” Referred to as “clone to kill,” a ban on only “reproductive cloning” would mandate that all cloned human embryos be killed since it would prohibit the placement of cloned embryos in wombs. Such a ban would create a new crime: the crime of trying to “initiate a pregnancy” with a cloned human embryo. Will the law then mandate an abortion, the destruction of a born child, or imprisonment of the mother and/or child? The only thing that an exclusive ban on reproductive cloning would ban is the survival of persons created through cloning. It’s worse than doing nothing at all. Thankfully, these “clone to kill” amendments, authored by Representative Gregg Underheim (R-Oshkosh) and Senator Alberta Darling (R-River Hills), were rejected by the Assembly and Senate respectively.

Senator Leibham and Representative Kestell are to be commended for their courageous and steadfast leadership in passing this critical bill intact. The states of Michigan, Iowa, Indiana, Arkansas, North Dakota and South Dakota have all passed comprehensive bans on human cloning, prohibiting both “reproductive cloning” and “therapeutic cloning.” Wisconsin needs to follow suit, and it’s up to the Governor to make the cloning ban a reality.

Governor Doyle claims that AB 499 will hinder life saving medical research in Wisconsin by obstructing stem cell research. This is simply not true, and if the Governor would read the bill he would have to agree. Assembly Bill 499 prohibits neither embryonic stem cell research nor adult stem cell research. What it does prohibit is somatic cell nuclear transfer which, as mentioned previously, is simply the scientific name for the human cloning process.

Unlike Stanford University, researchers at the University of Wisconsin-Madison are not creating human embryonic stem cells through therapeutic cloning. Rather, they are using embryonic stem cells extracted from embryos originally obtained from in-vitro fertilization clinics. While Pro-Life Wisconsin opposes the destruction of in vitro human embryos for their stem cells, AB 499 would not affect this activity.

Assembly Bill 499 does allow animal and tissue cloning and the promising medical research currently being done on adult stem cells. Ethically uncontroversial adult stem cells (which do NOT require the destruction of human embryos) have helped hundreds of thousands of patients, and new clinical uses expand almost weekly. The clinical use of adult stem cells has helped human patients with the following conditions (among many others): breast cancer, ovarian cancer, brain tumors, spinal cord repair, anemia, stroke, immunodeficiencies, blood and liver diseases, cardiac repair after heart attack, Type I diabetes, and corneal damage. In contrast, embryonic stem cells have never helped a human patient, and any claim that they may do so is pure conjecture.

Ultimately, we must defend the dignity of each human being by rejecting the utilitarian and dehumanizing practice of cloning. Pro-Life Wisconsin wants to see research progress toward the treatment of disease, and we *can* move forward ethically so long as we do not create a life simply to kill it for the benefit of another. Wisconsinites deserve the assurance that their state can build on its lead in biotechnology without compromising its bioethics.

To find out more about human cloning and embryonic stem cell research, please contact Pro-Life Wisconsin for free brochures: call 877-GODS-WILL, or e-mail info@prolifewisconsin.org.