United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 24, 2005

The Honorable William H. Frist, M.D.
United States Senate
Senate Hart Office Building 509
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Leader:

We are writing to urge you to bring H.R.810, "The Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act of 2005," to the floor for consideration without amendment as soon as possible. Today, the House of Representatives passed H.R.810, which is identical to S.471, with a strong bipartisan vote. It is time for the Senate to act on this critically important measure as well.

When the President announced his stem cell policy on August 9, 2001, we welcomed it as an important, though limited, first step. As you know, this policy restricts the number of stem cell lines that are eligible for federally funded research to those that were derived by the date of that announcement. It is now clear that these lines, all of which are contaminated with mouse feeder cells, will never be sufficient to realize the full potential of stem cell research. Our Nation's top scientists agree: The current federal policy is delaying progress toward cures and treatments for a wide range of diseases and health conditions that affect millions of Americans.

Passage of The Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act will expand the number of stem cell lines that are eligible for federally funded research. U.S. scientists and doctors will gain access to newer, more advanced lines that have never come in contact with mouse cells and, thus, are more likely to be used in clinical treatments. Moreover, none of the additional lines require the creation of new embryos; instead, these lines could be derived from any of the more than 400,000 embryos that are left over from fertility treatments and will otherwise be discarded.

In addition, this bill strengthens the ethical requirements that scientists must follow in conducting stem cell research. States are currently moving ahead with their own stem cell initiatives, creating a patchwork of laws that vary across the Nation. The Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act will ensure that all stem cell research in this country conforms to the same, high ethical standards.

A clear majority of Americans – from both parties – agree that the current federal stem cell policy should be expanded. The House of Representatives has just passed legislation that would accomplish this goal; the Senate must now do the same.

We urge you to schedule a vote on The Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act of 2005 as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

Arlen Specter

Tom Harkin

Orrin Hatch

Dianne Feinstein

Gordon H. Smith

Edward M. Kennedy