

***Tax Dollar Supported Discrimination against Human Beings
with Disabilities***

**Statement by the National Catholic Partnership on Disability
Concerning
Embryonic Stem Cell Research Executive Order**

March 30, 2009

The National Catholic Partnership on Disability received with dismay the news of President Barack Obama's executive order to allow citizens' tax dollars to be used to support research that requires the destruction of human embryos. In reality, this represents another example of society discriminating against human beings deemed unfit to live.

Thankfully, the federal Dickey Amendment states that federal funds are not to be used for engendering human embryos for research purposes. However, federal funds can be used to research on stem cells taken from embryos (thus, destroying the embryos), who have been rejected by their parents during the in vitro fertilization process, as long as the federal dollars do not pay for the actual destruction of the embryos. The fact that the embryos engendered by their parents are not wanted, in no way lessens their innate dignity.

Human beings with disabilities are gravely at risk. Many in vitro fertilization clinics practice pre-implantation genetic diagnosis. Studies indicate that embryos are denied the right to be nurtured in their mothers' wombs based on such arbitrary characteristics as gender. (Baruch, *Fertility and Sterility*, Sept 2006) Pre-implantation Genetic Diagnosis now can screen for up to 120 genetic diseases, from a predisposition to breast cancer to Down Syndrome. Ninety percent of fetuses with Down Syndrome are aborted. (*NY Times*, Sept 9, 2007) Life has become a commodity wherein "desirable" embryos can be ordered at will and "undesirable" human beings destroyed. Already, there is evidence of where such a societal philosophy is headed. In the Netherlands there is an approved protocol allowing for the termination of a neonate's life when it is determined that such life is not worth living. (Verhagen and Sauer, *NEJM*, Mar 10, 2005) Where will it end? Who will decide which persons with disabilities should be euthanized?

Recent advances have obviated the need for destroying human embryos to access stem cells. Scientists have demonstrated that they can reprogram ordinary and plentiful human skin cells into pluripotent stem cells which will not cause tumors or rejection (which are problems with embryonic stem cells). There are ethical research alternatives that already have successfully treated thousands of patients (adult stem cells, including umbilical cord blood, amniotic fluid and placental sources).

It is reported that persons with disabilities have the most to gain from embryonic stem cell research. However, the opposite is true. When others get to decide which human beings are deemed fit to live, and which are not, we all are at risk. The government must maintain a posture of respect towards all human life by not allowing tax payers' money to be used for research involving the destruction of human beings. It cannot single out certain lives as somehow uniquely suited for harmful or destructive research. Providing public funding to support research on cells obtained through the destruction of human beings, especially at their most vulnerable stages, is an affront to the dignity of all persons, especially those with disabilities, and beneath the moral stature of the United States of America.