To the Editor:

The bill that is being considered by the Wisconsin legislature to ban the use of fetal tissue and cells is unwise. This research has benefited millions, in the form of vaccines and treatments for diseases such as cancer, diabetes, Parkinson's disease, epilepsy, heart disease and viral and bacterial infections. The cell lines derived from fetal tissue are commonly used for research in laboratories worldwide. Other tissues and cells, such as those derived from miscarriages, cannot be substituted for this research, despite the claims of the proponents of this ban. The legislation will simply close off avenues of hope for patients. It will also send a strong message to biomedical scientists and the biotechnology industry that Wisconsin is no place to do business.

Donated fetal tissues yield critical insights into human development, birth defects, the etiology of disease, and how toxins and medicines may affect human health. As originally written, the legislation proposed by Rep. Jacque would criminalize the use of cells derived from human fetal tissues. One widely used cell line known as HEK293 is used in nearly 100 labs on the UW-Madison campus alone, and is critical for flu vaccine development and production. There is no suitable substitute for the HEK293 cell. To attempt to find a replacement for these or for cells derived in the future, in all their diverse applications, would cost billions and risk untold numbers of lives.

Research using fetal tissue is ethical. It was endorsed by federal advisory committees appointed by President Reagan and has continued to be federally funded under the George W. Bush and Obama administrations. It is already illegal - by federal law - to profit from the sale of human organs, adult or fetal. We wonder whether legislators have considered the ethical implications of denying current and future patients the benefits of the research that would be blocked by this legislation.

Sincerely,

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