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Assembly California Legislature



ANTHONY PORTANTINO
ASSEMBLYMEMBER, FORTY FOURTH DISTRICT

December 10, 2009

Senator Art Torres (Ret.)
Vice Chair, Independent Citizens Oversight Committee
California Institute for Regenerative Medicine
210 King Street
San Francisco, CA 94107

Re: California Umbilical Cord Blood Collection Program (CUCBCP)

Dear Senator Torres:

Thank you for your continued interest in umbilical cord blood banking. As you know, I came to the State Assembly to establish a public cord blood program in California. Our current system of discarding 98% of cord blood stem cells when we have thousands of Californians in dire need of transplants is unacceptable. After almost three years on this effort, including the passage of AB 34 establishing a public program within the Department of Public Health, and many hours of meeting with DPH staff, I have some concerns as to DPH's desire to administer this laudable and lifesaving program. Certainly the over 300 programs that DPH administers creates some serious constraints during this time of great budget uncertainty.

I currently have AB 52 in the Senate. AB 52 makes the program self-funding with a five-member Board and exempt staff who would review and select entities to collect cord blood for public use. I was also able to secure \$480,000 from the federal government to launch our public banking program with little interest from DPH to foster this effort.

I have come to strongly believe that the California Umbilical Cord Blood Collection Program (CUCBCP) is better placed within the California Institute of Regenerative Medicine as a separate, independent, self-funded program. It makes sense to me that California, which leads the nation through its establishment of CIRM, could boost its legacy as a stem cell leader with CUCBCP under its umbrella. While CUCBCP is about cord blood collections for public use

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and saving lives, it is also about 2/3's of those collections being unsuitable for transplantation and available for necessary research.

I am including a piece that briefly outlines five reasons to fold CUCBCP into CIRM and a copy of AB 52. It is my hope to have CIRM's active support of this effort when the Legislature reconvenes in January.

I respectfully request the opportunity to discuss this idea with you or persons designated by you within CIRM.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Anthony J. Portantino".

ANTHONY J. PORTANTINO
Assemblymember, 44th District

AP:ds

FIVE REASONS TO MOVE THE CALIFORNIA UMBILICAL CORD BLOOD COLLECTION PROGRAM FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH TO THE CALIFORNIA INSTITUTE FOR REGENERATIVE MEDICINE

1. Brings stem cell research and medical treatment into one agency.

The California Institute for Regenerative Medicine (CIRM) was established in 2004 through voter approval of Proposition 71. Its promise is "to make grants and loans for stem cell research...that will result in cures for ...major diseases."

The California Umbilical Cord Blood Collection Program (CUCBCP) was established through Assembly Bill 34 (Portantino, Chapter 517) in 2007 within the Department of Public Health. Its purpose is to collect high quality cord blood units as defined by the US Department of Health and Human Services for medical transplantation and dedicate units with insufficient cells for research on neonatal stem and progenitor cells.

The missions of CIRM and CUCBCP are complimentary in their respective goals to conduct stem cell research and find potential cures for diseases.

2. It's efficient, logical, and timely. DPH, with more than 300 varied health programs, is facing major budget cuts and significant reorganization. DPH has not expressed strong support for the funding source or proposed administration strategy of this program. The industry

of stem cell research and use for medical transplantation is highly specialized. Similar government pursuits should be collaborated to ensure efficiency and coordination. Placing the California Umbilical Cord Blood Collection Program within CIRM makes sense to keep the state's stem cell efforts coordinated, streamlined, and centralized.

3. It's a timely pursuit for CIRM. While CIRM is authorized to "conduct stem cell research which includes research involving adult stem cells, cord blood stem cells, pluripotent stem cells, and/or progenitor cells", there has been no specific focus by CIRM to collect cord blood and placental tissue for research even though cord blood stem cells have been successful in treating over 70 malignant and genetic diseases for more than 15 years. By bringing CUCBCP into its fold, CIRM would immediately become a more comprehensive stem cell agency delivering potential patient cures **now** and significantly expanding its research into these promising neonatal stem cells as only about 1/3 of cord blood collections have sufficient cell dose for transplantation, therefore 2/3s will be provided to California based stem cell researchers

4. CUCBCP will disappear without CIRM's rescue. DHP has indicated they have no plans to launch the CUCBCP. The author's efforts to structure the program based on current successful models have been

opposed by DPH. Due to the current low inventory of cord blood, thousands of patients a year die for want of a timely, sufficient, properly-matched stem cell source. Public collections focused on harvesting cord blood from underrepresented groups are necessary to mend the current deficiency and give all people an equal probability of receiving an appropriate HLA-matched unit.

Since curing maladies is the ultimate goal of both CIRM and CUCBCP, CIRM can rescue this program and use the genetically-diverse collections not needed for transplantation for research.

5. **CIRM would be the ideal entity to house this program** either as an independent structure within their agency as described in the current version of AB 52 or to oversee it for the following reasons:

(a) CIRM has a broad overview of all forms of stem cells and potential clinical utility

(b) CIRM finances regenerative medicine institutes at a number of state university medical schools and distributes hundreds of millions of dollars that has placed California in the lead worldwide for stem cell research.

(c) The collaboration will place stem cell therapy and research in one institution.