

Testimony on HB 5042 -- February 27, 2014
Dr. Milton Wallack

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before your committee and thank you for considering the potential continued funding for stem cell research in CT. My name is Dr. Milton Wallack and I am the founder of the CT Stem Cell Coalition and currently serve as a member of the CT Stem Cell Research Advisory Committee (SCRAC). I have also been affiliated with the Governor's Life Science Group. Most recently, I have participated in the CT trade mission to Israel which was chaired by Catherine Smith, commissioner of DECD.

While I/we sincerely appreciate certain aspects of Governor's Bill No. 5042 which extends "research" an additional two years until 2017 with the distribution of 20 million dollars, I/we have serious reservations about other components of the Bill. Prominent in this regard is a change of direction which the Bill espouses. My concern is that by turning away from a clear emphasis on *stem cell research* and instead to an emphasis on *regenerative medicine research*, we weaken what has been acknowledged nationally and internationally as a leading research program. There is also the apprehension that this new direction runs the risk of dismantling a program which has exhibited enormous scientific success - 641 published papers, 192 invention disclosures, 132 patents filed, while also making significant contributions to the economy of our state. Since 2006 stem cell research has fostered the creation of approximately 322 new high paying jobs. In this relatively short period of time we have seen the formation of at least 4 new companies related to stem cell research and more than 6 which are indirectly related or are in formation. This has all happened in a field of science that basically did not exist in CT before 2006. Perhaps even more impressive is that the 68.8 million dollars which the state has so far allocated for stem cell research has been leveraged to attract almost 300 million dollars of additional out of state funding. This amount is expected to grow, especially since the SCRAC has developed a new category of funding which involves disease directed research which has the potential of moving to FDA approved clinical trials within 4 years. This initiative alone will create more new companies and even more new jobs while also providing CT with increased royalties. In addition, we have seen Yale Medical School build the Amistad Building, which houses its stem cell program, at a cost of approximately 90 million dollars. Yale has also been motivated to expend at least 13 million dollars to recruit stem cell faculty and it is currently building a one million dollar cell therapy core for patient clinical trials. UConn Health Center has at the same time built a 52 million dollar facility to house cell and genome research labs. This facility also houses their Technology Incubation Program (TIP). Philanthropic fundraising efforts have also begun to take place. It therefore seems ill-conceived to change the focus of what in seven short years has become an approximate 500 million dollar industry.

My concern is that Bill 5042 actually does change the direction away from the specific support for *stem cell research* to the support of less specific *regenerative medicine research* or "research in a related field, including but not limited to embryology, genetics or cellular biology as stated in Sec. 4(a)(3)". I am also concerned that the Bill allows for decision making by the Advisory Committee of the Bioscience Innovation Fund (BIF) which gives it jurisdiction over the decisions made by the proposed Regenerative Medicine Research Committee - which, as I have already indicated, should remain as the Stem Cell Research Advisory Committee. In other words, we should retain the integrity of the SCRAC as a final decision making body. In addition, it is essential that the Bioscience Innovation Fund be separate from any other entity. This Bill, to the contrary, merges the BIF with another entity. Stem cell researchers are therefore expressing great anxiety and apprehension about these various aspects of Bill 5042. There is even concern for migration out of the state by many of these scientists because of the proposed change of direction of the Bill and even more concern for the additional layer of oversight and regulation. Also, in order to create greater security for researchers and their projects and in order to expand the stem cell field even more, I ask you to continue funding stem cell research for ten years to coincide with the commitment to the Bioscience Innovation Fund.

In summary, my recommendation is to change all references to the Regenerative Research Fund back to the Stem Cell Research Fund and to give the Stem Cell Research Advisory Committee final decision making power for this type of research and development. At the same time, the Bioscience Innovation Fund should remain as a separate entity with its stated emphasis on commercialization. In addition, the advisory committee for each fund should operate as separate entities, especially since they are each structured differently and with different goals. As a result, the Bioscience Innovation Fund will be able to focus on its specific mission. In addition, the Stem Cell Research Program will be able to continue building on its past successes and accomplishments as a leader in the expanding field of stem cell research with its contributions to science and economic growth.