

Campaign Life Coalition

Presentation to the House of Commons

Standing Committee on Health

June 13, 2002

Madame Chair and Committee Members,

We wish to thank you for having us present to you this morning, and also for your hard work in consideration of legislation on assisted human reproduction. The many hours of hearings and debate have given you a deep comprehension of the difficulties involved and of the pace at which science and medicine are moving in this new century.

For this Committee to undertake to examine and comment upon these issues merits congratulations. It is true that we, in Canada, have been slow to create a legislative framework for Reproductive Technologies and it is sorely needed. Bill C-56, in its objectives, is a step along the right path.

We are here today as representatives of Campaign Life Coalition, the National Political Pro-life Organization. We are pro-life and oppose embryonic stem cell research because it kills human beings. Therefore, our broad recommendation is that this research be banned and effort be centered upon somatic stem cell research.

You have before you only two very short ladies who have all the usual concerns; home, family, work and community, but also a very strong respect for human life. We are not experts, but we have consulted with experts in our examination of Bill C-56, *Assisted Human Reproduction Act*. One of the professionals with whom we have consulted is Dr. Dianne Irving, and you already have her written comments.

We are aware of the wishes of the Committee not to return to "square one" of the review of this legislation and we will abide by that wish as much as possible. However, there are a number of areas of the bill that cause major concern to Campaign Life Coalition.

The most obvious weakness of the bill is the lack of clarity in definitions. If definitions are not correct, or scientific, then the bill is flawed. The most obvious difficulty is the lack of a correct definition of "human being".

The second important definition is that of "cloning technique." Dr. Irving has stated, "The really critical issue is that there are many forms or techniques of cloning – not just Somatic Cell Nuclear Transfer cloning technique (and this is a definition found lacking as well). All of these cloning techniques could produce a new genetically unique living human being. All of these cloning techniques should be banned and prohibited."

She lists the others:

- Nuclear transfer using diploid primitive or immature germ line cells
- Twinning or fission

- Parthenogenesis
- De-methylation experiments in which a new human embryo is formed
- Use of male and/or female pronuclei to clone
- DNA-recombinant germ line gene transfer
- Mitochondrial cloning

There has been discussion whether a particular procedure not mentioned or listed in the bill will or will not automatically be prohibited. In this regard, Dr. Irving, who has made these comments, is not a lawyer nor a judge, nor are we, but it has been the experience in other jurisdictions that all must be listed.

Principles

We deeply regret the failure of Bill C-56 to recognize the human embryo as human life. This was recommended in the Canadian Alliance Minority Report along with the inclusion of the phrase, "Respect for human life." Failure to do so reflects an ethical weakness in the bill wherein the "Principles" have no firm base upon which to rest.

Clause 40. (2)

The issuance of a licence for embryonic research if the, "Agency is satisfied that the use is necessary for the purpose of the proposed research," presents a major stumbling block to all pro-life people. The "purpose" is neither explained nor listed. What "purpose" and what type of "research"? We have had, for a number of years, greatest difficulty in attempting to obtain a clarification of "medically necessary" in relation to the Canada Health Act. What does this word "necessary" mean in Bill C-56? To us, it indicates an open door. In principle, this clause allows for embryonic research.

Clause 5. (1) (j)

There have been a number of comments from other sources about the difficulty of protecting the use of "hybrids" for the "hamster test," used to determine male fertility. Care must be taken to include this as an "exception" to the prohibitions.

Clause 5. (1) (e)

This clause would prohibit identifying the sex of an embryo, "except to prevent, diagnose or treat a sex-linked disorder or disease." We believe that this would most often lead to the destruction of the embryo – for example in cases of muscular dystrophy or haemophilia. This could lead to eugenic practices and should be amended.

Clause 5. (1) (b)

The clause, in other words, allows that the embryo can be used for providing instructions in the techniques involved in In Vitro Fertilization. There is no prohibition on destruction of the embryo in this circumstance. We ask that this part of the bill be considered for removal.

Clause 8. (1), (2), (3)

Regarding the issue of consent, especially what should be free and informed consent, no person can give this consent if they are not provided with accurate scientific facts and this means that the definitions in the bill must be clarified. The same clause refers to the consent of the "donor." It is our opinion that the "donor" in the bill should be identified as the parent, or the mother/father of the embryo. This same wording is found in **Clause 65. (1) (a)** and leaves the decision to the Governor in Council. A human embryo is a living human being, the progeny of a human mother and a human father no matter what his/her fate will be. In truth, the real "donor" is the embryo who forfeits his life-giving stem cells where no full and informed consent is possible.

Clause 66. (2)

Clause 66 causes us much concern in that, in section (2) we find the wording very weak, with only the possible reference to a Committee of the House. We believe a committee should review new regulations, and it should likely be this Standing Committee on Health.

Clause 66. (3), (4), (5) and Clause 67. (2)

These sections apparently mean that the Minister may by-pass both the Committee and the House in a number of ways. We would recommend that these clauses be tightened considerably to make it necessary for changes to be reviewed, debated and voted upon. Considering the ever-changing scientific reality and the seriousness of these matters we feel that accountability must be real and obvious to the public.

Summary

We see the problems of Bill C-56 to be centered on three particular areas:

- Failure to recognize the humanity of the human embryo
- Definitions – absolutely critical
- Lack of accountability

To quote from a letter from one Member of Parliament, C-56, "speaks to the growing problem of infertility – approximately one out of eight couples suffer from infertility – and our increasing reliance on AHR." We wish to pose just a few questions to the Committee.

What consideration was given to the root causes of this enormous problem of infertility? Was there any place in the Committee work for recommendations for such things as umbilical cord blood banks and the perfection of the techniques for freezing human oocytes instead of embryos? And, was consideration given to the related costs of embryonic stem cell research, such as the expense of continued use of anti-rejection drugs?

Thank you.