June 13, 2000

The Honorable Nita Lowey
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Representative Lowey,

On behalf of the 10,000 scientists who belong to the American Society for Cell Biology, I am writing to express our opposition to Rep. Tom Coburn’s (R-OK) amendment regarding fetal tissue research to the Labor Health & Human Services Appropriations bill. If passed, this amendment will almost certainly have a chilling effect on several very important and potentially life-saving areas of biomedical research.

At a hearing of the Commerce Committee on March 9, Members from both sides of the aisle expressed a strong commitment to fetal tissue research. However, some Members were concerned that tissue suppliers might be illegally profiting from the sale of fetal tissue. During this thorough and in-depth hearing, no evidence was produced to support the claim that fetal tissue is being sold for profit to biomedical researchers. In fact, one witness claiming to have first hand knowledge of such illegal activity was convincingly discredited. In spite of the absence of evidence for illegal fetal tissue sales, and the complete lack of any evidence at all that medical researchers use fetal tissue inappropriately, Representative Coburn introduced the following amendment to the Labor HHS bill: "None of the funds made available in this Act may be used to acquire fetal tissue or baby body parts". What is most disturbing, the amendment clearly aims to hinder potentially life-saving research conducted by the researchers themselves, who are not even the subject of suspected abuses.

All available evidence indicates that those who use fetal tissue in their research are scrupulous in following the letter and spirit of current law, in part because biomedical researchers are keenly aware of the great sensitivity around its use.

Fetal tissue is vital to the advancement of critical biomedical research. As the Human Genome Project nears completion, the knowledge we will gain offers great promise for clinical treatment of many diseases such as diabetes, Parkinson's and Alzheimer's. The initial development of some of
Thank you for your ongoing dedication to medical research and your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,

Lawrence S. B. Goldstein, Ph.D.
University of California, San Diego School of Medicine
Investigator, Howard Hughes Medical Institute
For the ASCB Public Policy Committee