July 20, 2000

The Honorable Arlen Specter
Chairman
Senate Labor, Health & Human Services and Education
Appropriations Subcommittee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Specter:

You will recall that we wrote to you during consideration of the Labor Health & Human Services Appropriations bill on the Senate floor urging you to oppose Senator Robert Smith's (R-NH) amendment on fetal tissue research (a copy of that letter is attached). We are deeply grateful to you for helping to re-craft that amendment which we felt would have had a chilling effect on several very important and potentially life-saving areas of biomedical research.

The compromise Smith amendment, though much less damaging than the originally proposed amendment, still threatens life saving fetal tissue research. We also oppose this amendment because of the number and specificity of the inquiries it makes of the General Accounting Office. We fear, based on the detailed nature of the questions, that they may have been devised purposefully to be unanswerable so as to prolong this debate. We are further concerned that this apparent "nuisance strategy" will effectively produce a barrier to medical research.

As an alternative we urge that the Senate either remove the language or return to the original intent of the amendment that simply calls for a GAO study - rather than directing the GAO as to what inquiries it should make.

Lawfully acquired fetal tissue continues to be vital in the search for potential therapies for Parkinson's disease, sudden infant death syndrome and many other devastating diseases. Because of this need, Congress has already made legal the use of federal funds for this potentially life-saving research, with strict ethical
oversight and the clear prohibition of profiting from the sale of fetal tissue. Indeed, at a hearing of the House Commerce Committee on March 9, Members from both sides of the aisle expressed a strong commitment to federal support of fetal tissue research and found no evidence of wrongdoing.

Fetal tissue is vital to the advancement of critical biomedical research. Please do not include Senator Smith’s proposed language in the final Labor/HHS Appropriations bill.

Thank you for your assistance with this important issue.

Sincerely,

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Director of The Beckman Center
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Nobel Laureate in Chemistry, 1980
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Enclosure