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STEM CELL RESEARCH

Request: The Associated Medical Schools (AMS) of New York State thanks the Governor for introducing the *Stem Cell & Innovation Fund* and urges State Legislature to support responsible stem cell research. New York State needs legislation to support stem cell research, while banning reproductive cloning. By providing State funds to encourage scientists to invest in research and development in New York, we will position New York State as a thriving center for biotechnology and biomedical initiatives. As new treatment options evolve, the economic impact on the state will be enormous.

Background: New York State is home to one of the strongest biomedical research communities in the entire world. With fourteen medical schools, and approximately 100 teaching hospitals and other top quality research institutions, New York scientists are conducting some of the most cutting-edge, exciting research. This work runs the gamut from basic research, which helps us better understand human biology, to translational research, which leads to prevention of and treatments for debilitating and costly diseases. Only California and Massachusetts receive more funding from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) than New York State. Six New York institutions are among the top 50 recipients of NIH funding.

New York State's universities, teaching hospital, and research laboratories contribute significantly to the state's economy through employment, through spending and through the development of innovative products and concepts for the biotechnology and pharmaceutical industries. The academic medical community contributes an estimated $30 billion per year to the state's economy and generates more than 459,000 jobs.

Over the past six years, interest in stem cell research has grown tremendously. Over 100 million Americans are currently affected by some sort of debilitating disease and stem cell research has

the potential to help us develop new ways to understand, prevent, treat and perhaps even cure a whole host of conditions such as Parkinson's disease, type 1 diabetes, and ALS, just to name a few.

The few stem cell lines available for federally funded research are difficult to obtain and, in most instances, unsuitable for clinical research purposes. Because of the government's highly restrictive policy, scientists have been compelled to search elsewhere for assistance. This has triggered an international race to accumulate the necessary resources and research talent in order to position institutions, states, and even countries at the forefront of this emerging field. Several states have established, or are in the process of establishing, state-based stem cell research funds. While California – where voters agreed in 2004 to establish a ten-year, $3 billion stem cell research fund – is the most prominent and frequently cited example of such an initiative, New Jersey, Connecticut, Wisconsin, Illinois and Maryland have or are in the process of allocating public funds to this research.

Economically, New York State needs to create a fertile environment for biomedical research and biotechnology, particularly in the area of stem cell science. This includes partnering with universities to leverage resources for the capital investments needed to house these programs. While New York's institutions and biotechnology and pharmaceutical companies possess the necessary talent and technology to rapidly advance this research, our scientists are being targeted by institutions from California and elsewhere that have, or are in the process of creating, public funds dedicated to stem cell research. Their departure will be soon followed by the venture capital resources and companies that rely upon the cutting-edge innovations that emerge from our research community. The effects of this "brain drain" will reach into all corners of the state as university-based research, specifically in the field of biotechnology, is increasingly viewed as a vehicle for future economic growth.

On the other hand, if New York were to invest in stem cell research at a level comparable to that of other states, it would be able to reinforce its leadership position in medical research, create new jobs and companies, and develop technologies that could potentially improve the lives of millions of Americans. But this will only be possible if the state acts quickly to make up the ground that has already been lost.

AMS urges New York State to take action regarding stem cell research. The state should quickly pass policy statement legislation that would ban reproductive cloning but would also make it clear that the state supports stem cell research. Both the Senate and the Assembly introduced bills

last session including these provisions. It is critically important, however, to include human embryonic stem cell research, in addition to adult stem cells, in any legislation.

On January 31, 2007 Governor Spitzer announced his plan to invest $100 million in 2007-2008 for initial investments in "stem cell, life sciences, and other emerging industries." His administration would also push for a $1 billion bond to pay for stem cell and other medical research. We praise Governor Spitzer and Lt. Governor Paterson for their leadership and strongly support the introduction of a bond act for referendum. A substantial investment this fiscal year would make it clear to the scientific community that New York intends to remain a leader in biomedical research, as well as allow us to be seen as a viable candidate to compete with other states in the field of stem cell research.

We recognize that funding is tight and will be so again next year, but believe this is an important investment that could payoff both in terms of improved health and economic development. We believe there would be widespread bipartisan support for a proposal to provide funding for stem cell research. Strong State backing for stem cell research would help New York remain competitive in this highly promising field and, more importantly, could improve our chances of finding cures for disease and alleviating human suffering for millions.