



# Women First Research Coalition

September 11, 2020

The Honorable Alex Azar  
Secretary  
Department of Health and Human Services  
200 Independence Avenue S.W.  
Washington DC 20201

Dear Secretary Azar:

On behalf of the Women First Research Coalition (WFRC), we write to express concern with the National Institutes of Health's (NIH) recent report from the Human Fetal Tissue Ethics Advisory Board (Advisory Board). The final report recommended blocking funding from all but one research proposal seeking to use human fetal tissue. We respectfully request that you reject the recommendations and fund the fourteen research proposals.

WFRC is a coalition comprised of the nation's leading professional medical and research organizations specializing in women's health. Our coalition was formed to address pressing challenges in women's health research and to raise awareness among federal policymakers, Executive Branch officials and the public about the need for sustained and strengthened investment in women's health research, the prioritization of research in conditions that are specific to women or those conditions that may present differently in women than men, advance an equitable and appropriate investment in women's health research that improves the health outcomes of women, and ensure an adequate women's research workforce.

WFRC is particularly concerned that the Advisory Board report recommended enacting a broad ban that is based primarily on how the tissue is obtained (i.e. from elective abortions). The scientific validity of the research should not depend on how the tissue is obtained; the key criteria should be that the woman has given informed consent for its use. Human fetal tissue in research can be obtained from spontaneous abortions, elective abortions, or other first trimester procedures. We agree with the stipulation that primary investigators and investigators have to confirm that "no enticements, benefits or financial incentives were used at any level of the process to incentivize abortion or the donation of human fetal tissue." As long as these conditions have been met, then we believe that the research projects should continue to receive federal funding.

The use of human fetal tissue in research is critical to women's health research. Therefore, WFRC requests that you use your authority under 42 U.S.C. §289a-1(b) to reject the Advisory Board's recommendations and that you support funding the research proposals that have been peer-reviewed and considered scientifically meritorious to advance scientific discovery.

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#### SUPPORTING ORGANIZATIONS

AMERICAN COLLEGE OF OBSTETRICIANS & GYNECOLOGISTS • AMERICAN GYNECOLOGICAL & OBSTETRICAL SOCIETY  
AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR REPRODUCTIVE MEDICINE • AMERICAN UROGYNECOLOGIC SOCIETY  
INFECTIOUS DISEASE SOCIETY FOR OBSTETRICS & GYNECOLOGY • NORTH AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR PEDIATRIC AND  
ADOLESCENT GYNECOLOGY  
SOCIETY FOR ASSISTED REPRODUCTIVE TECHNOLOGY • SOCIETY FOR ACADEMIC SPECIALISTS IN GENERAL OBSTETRICS AND  
GYNECOLOGY  
SOCIETY OF FAMILY PLANNING • SOCIETY OF GYNECOLOGIC ONCOLOGY • SOCIETY FOR MATERNAL-FETAL MEDICINE  
SOCIETY FOR REPRODUCTIVE ENDOCRINOLOGY AND INFERTILITY • SOCIETY FOR REPRODUCTIVE  
INVESTIGATION

WFRC is committed to working with you to ensure an appropriate investment in women's health research. We appreciate the opportunity to express our concerns to you and we thank you for your continued support. Should you have any questions or wish to discuss these issues further, please contact Erika Miller at [emiller@dc-crd.com](mailto:emiller@dc-crd.com).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Laurel W. Rice".

Laurel W. Rice, MD  
Chair, Women First Research Coalition