

"Nature in everything demands respect, and those who violate her laws seldom violate them with impunity."

*Mary Wollstonecraft
A Vindication of the Rights of Women, 1792*

Testimony of Margaret Colin
Before the Commerce Committee
Subcommittee on Science and Technology
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Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for this opportunity to discuss an issue that is dear to my heart. I am here today on behalf of Feminists for Life of America, an organization that opposes the creation and destruction of human clones for stem cell research.

In the tradition of Susan B. Anthony and other early American feminists, we oppose all violence. Feminists for Life is proud to serve on the National Violence Against Women Task Force, and is a member of the National Coalition Against the Death Penalty.

Suffragist organizer Elizabeth Cady Stanton, whose statue sits down the street in the Capital building, strongly criticized the destruction of newly formed humans as "property to be disposed of as we see fit." The proper role of medical research is to eradicate illness, not create and then destroy human beings.

Disease and disability affect every family in America. My husband, actor Justin Deas, is committed to raising funds in order to bring about a cure for ALS after a friend and colleague died from it. I have helped to raise funds for Juvenile Diabetes Association because a college friend's daughter was diagnosed with it. I have also supported the National Association of Breast Cancer Organizations and the Pediatric Aids Foundation. Like you, we are committed to finding a cure to debilitating diseases and relieve human suffering.

I am not a scientist, but it was widely reported that it took hundreds of attempts to clone a sheep before Dolly was created without gross fetal anomalies. Cloning, therefore, would seem to be an unreliable source for stem cells – in addition to violating the basic tenants of feminism – non-violence, non-discrimination, and justice for all.

My intent here is not to downplay the importance of medical research, but to plead for standards that ensure we do not abuse our power by choosing who is important enough to live while disposing of another. We are wasting time arguing over destroying life while we all want to protect and improve it.

Fortunately, we can move forward with medical research from stem cells derived from a multitude of sources. We do not need to go to extreme measures by making and destroying carbon copies of people. Alternative sources to cloning, which present no ethical problems, are proving to be very promising for those who would benefit from medical research.

We urge you to direct federal funds to support these promising new alternatives, including stem cells acquired from consenting adults, women donating placenta and umbilical cord blood donations – even stem cells from fat, which I have a feeling many of us would be more than happy to donate, in the name of science, of course.

Feminist pioneer Mary Wollstonecraft, who in 1792 wrote the landmark book, “The Vindication of the Rights of Women,” prophetically warned, “Nature in everything deserves respect, and those who violate her laws seldom violate them with impunity.” This woman, who championed the rights of women and condemned the destruction of embryos, died giving birth to her second daughter. Named Mary after her mother, she too, became a great writer. Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley fictionalized her mother’s warning through her classic novel, “Frankenstein.”

I am here today to keep a promise to my 7-year-old son, Joe. Together, with his brother Sam, we watch their favorite shows, invariably animated science fiction, which preach the benefits of cloning humans to harvest body parts for the use of others. On one occasion we watched one of mom’s shows -- a human interest piece interviewing a mother and father who decided to have a second child in order to harvest cells to save the life of their first born child.

My Joe asked me, “Are they going to kill the baby?” I asked him why he thought the parents would kill their child. He told me that he knows all about human clones created to supply human parts for others.

So, I promised my son. No, our government does not create human clones for research and then destroy them.

You have in your hands the power to decide whether the creation and destruction of innocent human beings is ever justifiable, whether the manipulation of the laws of nature is without risk.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, for serving those who practice and those who would benefit from research within ethical boundaries. Feminists for Life and I support non-destructive forms of stem cell research. By redirecting much-needed funds to promising new alternatives, your compassion translates into life-saving action.