

Ind. lawmakers OK cord-blood banks and anti-porn bill, but conscience clause loses

By Brigid Curtis Ayer
4/1/2008

The Catholic Review

INDIANAPOLIS, Ind. (The Catholic Moment) - Property tax reform dominated the headlines during the 116th session of the Indiana General Assembly, but two proposals supported by the Indiana Catholic Conference — to encourage adult stem-cell research and limit pornography — soon will become law, too.

Increasing access to an ethical source of adult stem cells through the creation of a public umbilical cord blood bank is the goal of legislation written by Rep. Peggy Welch (D-Bloomington) which passed on March 13, one day before adjournment.

It requires the state Family and Social Service Administration (FSSA) to create a governmental nonprofit corporation to establish and run an umbilical cord blood bank; begin an umbilical cord blood donation initiative, and promote public awareness concerning the medical benefits of umbilical cord blood.

The two most common sources of stem cells are embryonic and adult stem cells, but a lesser known source is material discarded after the birth of a child — the umbilical cord, cord blood, placenta and amniotic fluid.

Stem cells also can be taken from adult tissues and organs such as bone marrow, fat from liposuction, regions of the nose and even cadavers.

Welch explained that people will be able to donate cord blood to a public cord blood bank the same way they currently donate blood.

“When a person donates blood, they do so in order that someone else may benefit from it. That would be the same motivation for donating to a public cord blood bank,” she said. “The priority of the cord blood bank would be for transplants, the secondary purpose would be for research.”

Dr. Scott Goebel, who is responsible for cord blood transplants at Riley Children’s Hospital in Indianapolis, said, “We have children and adults in Indiana, as well as around the country, who die each year from the lack of a suitable hematopoietic stem cell (marrow or cord blood) donor, which is both regrettable and correctable with more cord blood banking.”

Two out of 10 cord blood donations are of transplantable quality, but the other eight would have research value.

“What is exciting about this legislation is Indiana will be receiving hundreds of thousands of umbilical cord blood units with postnatal tissue for transplants and research,” Welch said. “The goal is that we will increase the number of transplantable stem cells, help save lives of cancer patients, provide more research quality stem cells and improve the quality of life for Hoosiers both physically and financially.”

Welch said she thinks a public cord blood bank will bring more researchers and significant research dollars to Indiana, and help the economy. The bank would be self-supporting in two to three years from its inception, she estimated.

Private and public umbilical cord blood banks have proven invaluable. Doctors use cord blood cells to treat approximately 70 diseases, mostly anemias or cancers of the blood, such as leukemias and lymphomas.

Regulating pornography

An anti-pornography proposal written by state Rep. Terry Goodin (D-Crothersville) also passed. A store that opened in Goodin’s district gave residents the impression it would be selling books, movies and snacks, but sold sexually graphic materials.

“Had the residents been notified, they could have petitioned to keep the retailer out,” Goodin said. His bill was designed to create stronger, more consistent pornography regulation statewide.

The bill requires a person or business intending to sell sexually explicit materials, products or services to register with the secretary of state, and pay a \$250 filing fee. The secretary of state must notify certain local officials of the home county of the new business. Violators commit a Class B misdemeanor, and can face up to 180 days in jail or a \$1,000 fine. The bill will apply to businesses established after June 30, 2008, and existing businesses that move to a new location.

Immigration bill fails

A proposal to penalize employers who knowingly hire undocumented immigrants failed when a compromise between House and Senate versions of the proposal could not be reconciled.

Some of the concerns about the bill included the possibility of racial profiling, detrimental effects on Indiana’s economy and harm to immigrant families and children, both legal and illegal.

The Indiana Catholic Conference testified against the proposal.

“The Catholic Church does not support illegal immigration, and respects the right of nations to control their borders,” said Glenn Tebbe, ICC executive director. But he also explained to lawmakers that the Church was concerned about the effects the proposal would have on employers, immigrant families and children.

“Putting hundreds of people out of work will only add to the social concerns in the community,” Tebbe said. “Presently those working are caring for their family needs and contributing to the common good.” Tebbe noted that similar

laws enacted in Arizona and Oklahoma are having “detrimental effects” on the economy and on the families of immigrants, both legal and illegal.

Members of the Hispanic community, the Indiana Chamber of Commerce and the Indiana Manufacturers Association also opposed the bill.

The bill would have punished businesses that knowingly hire undocumented workers by suspending their business licenses or revoking them after three violations.

The immigration reform proposal died when two of the conferees, Sen. Thomas Weatherwax (R-Logansport) and Rep. Scott Pelath (D-Michigan City), failed to sign off on the final conference committee agreement.

In other action

— Taxation of churches, church property and non-profits, Senate Joint Resolution 2, failed. It would have taxed non-profits, possibly including churches and church property. The ICC opposed the bill.

— A proposal focused on homeless youth and foster care, House Bill 1165, passed. It will provide a comprehensive investigation of youth who are homeless and address issues involving the foster care system. It also will help provide educational alternatives and clarify rules and responsibilities of the agencies involved with caring for the youth. The ICC supported it.

— Legislation concerning informed consent before an abortion, Senate Bill 146, failed. The bill would have enhanced Indiana’s informed consent law for women seeking an abortion. The ICC supported it.

— The pharmacists’ conscience clause bill, Senate Bill 2, also failed. It would have granted pharmacists the same professional courtesy as doctors and other medical professionals and given them the right to follow their consciences. Under the bill, pharmacists could have refused to fill prescriptions such as the “morning after pill.” The ICC supported the legislation.