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December 13, 2018

Chairman Jim Jordan
Ranking Member Raja Krishnamoorthi
U.S. House of Representatives
House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
Subcommittee on Healthcare, Benefits and Administrative Rules
Washington, DC 20515

Chairman Mark Meadows
Ranking Member Gerald Connolly
U.S. House of Representatives
House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
Subcommittee on Government Relations
Washington, DC 20515

RE: Testimony for the Record for Hearing on Alternatives to Fetal Tissue Research

Dear Chairman Jordan, Chairman Meadows, Ranking Member Krishnamoorthi, and Ranking Member Connolly:

I am writing on behalf of the HIV Medicine Association (HIVMA) to express our strong opposition to placing restrictions on the use of fetal tissue to conduct biomedical research. HIVMA represents more than 5,000 physicians, researchers, scientists and other healthcare professionals who work on the frontlines of the HIV epidemic providing prevention and care and conducting research in communities across the country. We are concerned that limiting or barring the use of fetal tissue in current and future research will be a major setback to important work to develop an HIV cure and vaccine and to develop more effective HIV medications.

The topic of today's hearing is concerning because there are no existing alternative research models that can replace fetal tissue research being conducted to prevent, treat and cure HIV. Fetal tissue research is the gold standard for allowing researchers to fully model the formation of human blood and immune system cells in human tissues. Being able to realistically model human blood and immune system cells is critical to developing medications effective at stopping replication of HIV and studying mechanisms to permanently control or eliminate the virus from a person's body.

While significant advances in biomedical research have transformed HIV from a fatal to a chronic condition for those with access to HIV treatment, people living with HIV must have lifelong, uninterrupted access to a regimen of at least three antiretrovirals to suppress the virus, stay healthy and prevent disease progression. Due to a number of factors including stigma and discrimination and barriers to treatment including cost, just over 50 percent of people living with HIV are virally suppressed in the U.S. and nearly 40,000 new HIV cases continue to occur annually in the U.S. The ongoing evolution of HIV treatment modalities in addition to the development of an HIV vaccine and cure are critical components of the armamentarium of tools needed if we are to end new HIV infections and improve outcomes for all people living with HIV.

We urge policymakers not to undercut the promise offered by fetal tissue research in reducing the impact of the HIV epidemic currently affecting 1.1 million Americans living with HIV and 36.9 million individuals worldwide. Protect the integrity of biomedical research by ensuring that decisions regarding research and research methods are driven by science and not stymied by ideology. The health and lives of millions of Americans including those living with and at higher risk for HIV are counting on it. Please contact the HIVMA Executive Director Andrea Weddle at aweddle@hivma.org with questions regarding our comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Hardy, MD". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

David Hardy, MD
Chair, HIVMA Board of Directors