

Testimony of
Ms. Kris Gulden

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Good morning Senator Feinstein and Members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the value of somatic cell nuclear transfer (SCNT), commonly referred to as therapeutic cloning. My name is Kris Gulden, and I am here on behalf of the Coalition for the Advancement of Medical Research (CAMR). The Coalition is an organization comprised of universities, scientific and academic societies, patient's organizations, and other entities that are devoted to supporting stem cell research. In addition, I realize that today I am the voice of the millions of Americans living with MS, spinal cord injuries, ALS, Parkinson's Disease, and many other illnesses that may benefit from therapeutic cloning.

I, along with the Coalition for the Advancement of Medical Research, support efforts to prohibit human reproductive cloning. However, it is imperative that we protect important areas of medical research that offer hope to millions of Americans. As a person living with paralysis caused by a spinal cord injury, I know how urgently a cure is needed. I do not expect a cure tomorrow, or even next year. And I do not intend to overstate the promise of the research. But how can you overstate hope?

On May 26, 1998, I set out on a bicycle ride that would change my life. When I began, I was a healthy, 31 year old-triathlete. I was employed as a police officer in Alexandria, Virginia. I never finished that ride; it was interrupted when I was struck from behind by a motor vehicle. In addition to a traumatic brain injury and a laundry list of broken bones, I sustained a spinal cord injury at the T4 level. The doctors told me that I had about a 20% chance of ever walking again. My friends and family had to incorporate the word "paraplegia" into their vocabularies. In an instant, my future was changed from adrenaline and thrill-seeking to wheelchairs and hand controls.

Six weeks after my accident, I discovered that I could move my legs. And in that instant, I discovered hope. I knew that if it were only a matter of strengthening my leg muscles, I would in fact walk again. And within three months, I was walking with a rolling walker.

In the summer of 1999 I went to the University of Miami to go through EMG biofeedback training. This proved to be an exciting therapy that gave me even more optimism that I would one day walk again. However, a rare complication of a spinal cord injury - a disease called syringomyelia - has caused me to lose considerable function. I have not, though, lost hope. I have gone back to Miami for additional sessions of biofeedback, and I remain committed to the idea of walking again. Additionally, the potential for new therapies like cloning gives hope to so many people.

I understand that the word "cloning" has caused many individuals to imagine the worst possible abuses. But allow me to make a critical distinction between the use of cloning technology to

create a baby - reproductive cloning - and the therapeutic cloning techniques central to the production of breakthrough medicines, diagnostics, and potentially vaccines to treat diseases like Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, diabetes, heart disease, various cancers, and even paralysis resulting from spinal cord injury. Therapeutic cloning cannot produce a whole human being. This work should be allowed to move forward.

Somatic cell nuclear transfer may prove to be a vital tool in allowing scientists to fully develop the promise of stem cell research. Somatic cell nuclear transfer involves the use of a donor's unfertilized egg and a patient's own cells. The research could allow a patient's own genetic material to be used to develop stem cell therapies specifically tailored to that individual's medical condition, thus not triggering an immune rejection response. In other words, using somatic cell nuclear transfer could repair patients with their own cells.

Given the scientific potential in this area, we strongly oppose any legislative action that would ban research related to therapeutic cloning. This would include criminalizing the research or the researchers, and prohibiting the importation of therapies derived from somatic cell nuclear transfer in other countries.

Ms. Chairperson, it is likely that we will continue to be confronted with scientific advances that pose difficult social and ethical questions. The present momentum in biomedical research, and the profound implications of what we are learning, will inevitably raise public concerns. Yet an across-the-board ban on human cloning will dash the hopes of many Americans living lives that, like mine, are so radically, functionally, and emotionally different than what they once were.

In my dreams, I still walk. I run, I play basketball, and I wear the uniform of the Alexandria Police Department. When the sun rises each morning, it brings reality with it. I rise to the sight of a wheelchair, yet I rise with the hope that maybe this will be the morning I can move my legs.

On behalf of the Coalition for the Advancement of Medical Research, the countless Americans who stand to benefit from therapeutic cloning, and the family members and friends who love them, I again thank the Committee for its deliberations and for the opportunity to speak to this issue.