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Stem Cell Initiative Submits Signatures to Qualify for November Ballot

Overcoming Challenges from COVID-19, the Campaign Activated Patient Advocacy Groups to Collect Signatures by Mail to Cross the Finish Line While Voters 'Sheltered in Place'

PALO ALTO, CA — The California Stem Cell Research, Treatments and Cures Initiative of 2020 today finished submitting approximately 925,000 signatures to California's counties to be counted and verified to qualify the initiative for the November 2020 ballot. If passed, the initiative will authorize \$5.5 billion in state general obligation bonds to renew funding for the continued advancement of treatments and cures that could save or improve the lives of millions living with chronic diseases and conditions.

When California's shelter in place orders brought in-person signature gathering to a screeching halt in March, several ballot measure campaigns were forced to throw in the towel. However, the mission of the 2020 stem cell initiative was too important to give up. The campaign adapted to the unprecedented situation, launching an aggressive patient advocacy driven signature gathering effort to empower voters to participate in the California democratic process from the safety of their own homes. In the following weeks, the campaign received thousands of petitions by mail, overcoming the challenges of COVID-19, and gathering the final signatures needed to cross the finish line and submit.

"Submitting signatures in time to qualify for the general election would not have been possible without our coalition of patient advocates, who banded together to help us overcome the unprecedented challenge of signature gathering during a global pandemic – the effort is emblematic of our movement that has been widely supported and driven by patients and their families from the beginning," said **Bob Klein, Chairman of Californians for Stem Cell Research, Treatments and Cures**. "We're confident that we've submitted enough valid signatures to qualify for the ballot this November, and we will continue to fight for the continuation of California's groundbreaking stem cell research program on behalf of the millions of California patients and families searching for treatments and cures."

In 2004, voters overwhelmingly approved Proposition 71 with more than 59% of the vote, establishing the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine (CIRM) and authorizing a \$3 billion investment in stem cell research to advance therapies and treatments for diseases and conditions including cancer, heart disease, Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, diabetes and most recently, COVID-19. Last month, California's stem cell institute allocated \$5 million to fund research for COVID-19, and recently awarded a series of grants, one of which went to Dr. John

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Zaia from City of Hope to conduct a clinical trial for a potential [treatment](#). But vital research and therapy development like Dr. Zaia's will soon end, unless California voters pass the 2020 initiative this November.

"We could be on the brink of medical discoveries that could save the lives of patients impacted by COVID-19 and other diseases, and this research simply would not be possible without the initial investment Californians made in the state's stem cell program in 2004," said **Dr. John Zaia, Director of City of Hope's Alpha Stem Cell Clinic** – a world class CIRM funded clinic created to accelerate and improve human trials. "Now, it is absolutely critical that this investment is renewed, allowing researchers like myself to continue to discover treatments and cures that can improve or save the lives of patients today and for generations to come."

Additionally, two discovery stage project grants have been awarded by CIRM to scientists at the University of California, Los Angeles. These studies will use different approaches to identify possible new therapies for COVID-19. A previously CIRM-funded therapy is also being re-purposed for testing in COVID-19 patients as a potential treatment. These examples demonstrate CIRM's commitment to advancing medical research, as well as the potential broad application of CIRM-funded studies.

California's stem cell research program has led to more than 80 clinical trials that have already saved and improved lives. CIRM-funded research has also led to more than 2,900 published medical discoveries that have the potential to provide groundbreaking new treatments and cures. If Californians do not pass the 2020 stem cell initiative, vital research will come to a halt, potentially delaying lifesaving and life-changing treatments for years, or even a decade or more.

By continuing this program, California has the potential to help millions who are living with chronic diseases and conditions including cancer, Alzheimer's, heart disease, diabetes, Parkinson's, spinal cord injuries, blindness, HIV/AIDS, multiple sclerosis, kidney disease and many more. For this reason, the initiative has strong support from the patient advocacy and scientific communities, with more than 50 patient advocacy organizations, Nobel Prize winners, and respected medical professionals and scientists as members of the [coalition](#).

"The 2004 stem cell initiative supported breakthrough diabetes research, now in human clinical trials, which shows encapsulated cells can produce insulin in people with type 1 diabetes," said **Aaron J. Kowalski, Ph.D., President and CEO of JDRF**. "Passing the California Stem Cell Research, Treatments and Cures Initiative of 2020 will help further advance promising research, develop new treatment opportunities and provide hope for cures for people with diabetes and other chronic diseases."

"We've been a proud supporter of this initiative from its inception," said Senior VP of Public Policy, **Ted Thompson, JD of the Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson's Research**. "We were honored to participate in the campaign's mail-in signature gathering effort and activate

the Parkinson's community in support of such a critical initiative that provides hope to those living with Parkinson's and other illnesses without a cure."

"The 2004 stem cell initiative has led to remarkable medical discoveries and has had an incredible effect on paralysis research and treatment development. Californians must continue what we started by passing the 2020 initiative," said **Peter T. Wilderotter, President and CEO of the Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation**. "By passing the 2020 initiative, California can help accelerate the development of more treatments and cures for chronic diseases and conditions that touch nearly all California families – from cancer and heart disease to spinal cord injuries and neurological disorders."

"California's stem cell program has made remarkable progress in accelerating scientific discovery and developing the potential for treatments and cures so desperately needed for those suffering from chronic diseases and conditions," said **Fred Fisher, President and CEO of The ALS Association Golden West Chapter**. "For those with ALS and other neurodegenerative diseases, we must continue the effort that began in 2004 and ensure the passage of the 2020 initiative."

"As a member of the medical community on the frontlines, watching how currently incurable diseases, conditions and injuries impact families every day, I know how critically important it is to continue to conduct research that can provide real hope to the millions of Californians who need it most," said **Dr. Joseph Wu, Director of the Stanford Cardiovascular Institute**. "The California Stem Cell Research, Treatments and Cures Initiative of 2020 could lead to a lifesaving treatment for you or someone you love."

After the counties submit their random sample counts, the Secretary of State has until June 25 to certify initiatives for the November 2020 ballot. To learn more about the California Stem Cell Research, Treatments and Cures Initiative of 2020 or to join our growing coalition, please visit www.caforcures.com.

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