

April 1, 2010

The Honorable William Monning
Chair, Assembly Health Committee
California State Assembly
State Capitol, Room 6005
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Assembly Bill 1931 (Torrico) – SUPPORT

Dear Assembly Member Monning:

On behalf of the California Healthcare Institute (CHI), whose more than 250 members include our state's premier life sciences companies and academic research institutions, I am writing in support of AB 1931, a bill that would extend the sunset date of the Roman Reed Spinal Cord Injury Research Act of 1999 from January 1, 2011 to January 1, 2016.

The Roman Reed Spinal Cord Injury Research Act of 1999 was first approved in September of 2000, and then reauthorized for five additional years in 2005. The act is named after a California college football player, Roman Reed, who suffered a crushed vertebrae during a game. The act allocates dollars to a fund which provides grants for research programs that aim to ameliorate the damage from traumatic spinal cord injuries. The University of California has established a laboratory, the Roman Reed Laboratory at the University of California – Irvine, which specializes in research for spinal cord injuries.

Since its inception in 2000, the Roman Reed Spinal Cord Injury Research Act has achieved major successes. Over 300 Californians have participated in 120 Roman Reed funded research projects. Additionally, 64 graduate students have been funded as Roman Reed Fellows. The research that has come out of these projects is remarkable. The fund granted dollars for the first state-funded stem-cell research project in the nation. Led by Dr. Hans Kierstead, the project examined how to reinsulate damaged spinal nerves after a traumatic spinal cord injury. The first human trials for Dr. Kierstead's project are expected this fall.

Other projects funded by the Roman Reed Spinal Cord Injury Research Act are underway at several universities throughout the state, including the University of California, San Francisco; University of California, San Diego; and University of California, Los Angeles. These studies are investigating how the nervous system can use new pathways to issue movement commands; how drugs that block the body's immune response to an initial trauma can increase the likelihood of recovery from a spinal cord injury; and how research funded by the Roman Reed Spinal Cord Injury Research Act can be expedited to human clinical trials.

In addition to the research successes California has witnessed under the Roman Reed Spinal Cord Injury Research Act, the state has benefitted greatly by leveraging its investment into the program to receive federal matching dollars as well as other grant resources. In the past decade, Californians have spent just under \$13.9 million to fund the Roman Reed Spinal Cord Injury Research Act. In return, those funds have been leveraged to bring an additional \$59.9 million in research and development dollars into the state; another \$7.35 million in funding is currently pending.

CHI strongly supported the Roman Reed Spinal Cord Injury Research Act in 1999 and its reauthorization in 2004. The funding for this program has been smartly applied to maximize important neurological research to the end of producing viable treatments for spinal cord injuries. Few investments made by the state of California can boast a nearly five-to-one return ratio in matching funds from federal and other grant programs.

For these reasons, we strongly urge the legislature to reauthorize the Roman Reed Spinal Cord Injury Research Act for an additional five years. Approximately 646,000 Californians rely on the research funded by this program to continue so that they may one day overcome paralysis due to a spinal cord injury. At this time of economic difficulty in the state, the opportunity to continue this research while attracting well-paying biomedical research and development funding is a rare win-win for the legislature.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sandra Pizarro". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Sandra Pizarro
Vice President – State Government Affairs

CC: Chair & Members, Assembly Health Committee
Assembly Member Alberto Torrico
Assembly Republican Caucus