



CENTER FOR
GENETICS AND SOCIETY

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John P. Holdren, Director, Office of Science and Technology Policy;
Co-Chair, President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology
Eric Lander, Co-Chair, President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology
Jo Handelsman, Associate Director, Science Division, Office of Science and Technology Policy

November 14, 2016

Dear Drs. Holdren, Lander, and Handelsman,

The outcome of last week's election lends a new kind of urgency to a great many issues, among them the prospect of genome editing for human reproduction. We were in touch about this in April 2015, and are following up now in the hope that you may be in a position to build on your support for responsible uses of genome editing during the short time left before the incoming Administration takes office.

We very much appreciated Dr. Holdren's May 2015 note on genome editing that stated,

“The Administration believes that altering the human germline for clinical purposes is a line that should not be crossed at this time.”

We also welcomed the culminating statement from the December 2015 *International Summit on Human Gene Editing* that it would be “irresponsible to proceed” with human germline modification in the absence of “broad societal consensus.”

Since then national and international media attention to CRISPR has only grown, and public opinion polls continue to show significant discomfort with any effort to genetically modify the traits of future generations. However, many Americans remain unaware of the speed with which gene editing tools are being developed, and with their implications.

And unfortunately, there have not yet been significant efforts toward organizing meaningful public engagement with this deeply consequential matter.

Along with other scholars and public interest advocates, we continue to work toward that goal, and we write now to ask whether the Office of Science and Technology Policy and the Obama Administration might consider providing additional assistance in that effort. We believe it would be immensely significant for OSTP and/or other Administration officials to publicly affirm that

gene editing for human reproduction would be both unacceptably risky from a safety standpoint, and unacceptably dangerous from a social and policy standpoint.

Such a statement would be in keeping with the Obama Administration's strong record of support for socially beneficial scientific and technical advances, with its willingness to take on difficult issues with nuance and clarity, and with President Obama's unequivocal declaration in March 2009 about human reproductive cloning, a similarly irresponsible prospect. The President said:

“We will ensure that our government never opens the door to the use of cloning for human reproduction. It is dangerous, profoundly wrong, and has no place in our society, or any society.”

As you know, some 45 countries already prohibit human germline modification for reproduction by law and/or by their ratification of a legally binding international treaty, the Council of Europe's Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine.

We cannot risk having this issue defined in the United States either by anti-science voices or by those unwilling to consider or abide by policies that advance and protect the public interest.

Thank you very much for your consideration of this request during a difficult and challenging time. We would welcome the opportunity to talk further with you, if that would be of help.

Best regards,

Marcy Darnovsky, Executive Director, Center for Genetics and Society
Troy Duster, Chancellor's Professor of Sociology, University of California, Berkeley
Jaydee Hanson, Policy Director, International Center for Technology Assessment