

Detroit-area couple in court over control of frozen embryos

June 5 2018, by Ed White

A Detroit-area woman seeking custody of as many as 10 frozen embryos is asking a judge to appoint a guardian over them while she clashes with her former partner for control.

Gloria Karungi and Ronaldlee Ejalu have a daughter who has [sickle cell disease](#). Karungi believes if she can bear another child with one of the [embryos](#), [bone marrow cells](#) from that sibling could potentially cure the girl's blood illness.

But Ejalu must give his consent, according to a contract with an in vitro fertilization clinic, and he's not interested. Karungi and Ejalu never married and are no longer together.

Oakland County Judge Lisa Langton last year said she didn't have the authority to wade into the embryo dispute; she was simply determining financial support and parenting time for the couple's daughter. But the Michigan appeals court sent the case back to Langton for more work, including an evidentiary hearing if necessary.

Karungi "wants to cure her daughter and is seeking the embryos to that end. ... Without the embryos coming to term, that child has no ability to be cured," the woman's attorney, Dan Marsh, said in a court filing.

Ejalu's lawyer, Dan Weberman, said he'll argue again that a Family Division judge has no role in what's basically a contract quarrel. He also said it's misleading for Karungi to claim that cells from a sibling are the

only cure for the 7-year-old girl.

"They want to paint a picture like she's on her death bed," Weberman told The Associated Press. "She's in school. She's a happy girl. She gets treatment once a month."

Ejalu no longer believes that using frozen embryos is a good idea.

"He doesn't feel ethically that a life should be created for human tissue harvesting. That's somewhat mind-boggling," Weberman said.

Under orders from the appeals court, Langton on June 20 again will hear arguments on whether she has jurisdiction over contested property held by unmarried parties. But in the meantime, the judge has scheduled a hearing for Wednesday on Karungi's request to have a lawyer appointed as guardian over the embryos.

Karungi's legal team believes it got a boost in April when the state Supreme Court declined to intervene at this stage of the case. Justice Bridget McCormack added her own postscript to the one-sentence order, saying Langton shouldn't sidestep "whether [frozen embryos](#) are persons subject to a custody determination."

No other justice joined her remarks. Weberman said they were "gratuitous and irrelevant."

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