

Opening Statement
Senator Susan Collins
“Redefining Reality: How the Special Diabetes Program is Changing the Lives of Americans
with Type 1 Diabetes”
July 10, 2019

Good morning everybody. It’s wonderful to welcome all of you here to Washington D.C. This is our eleventh Children’s Congress and it is always a privilege to work with JDRF families, whose commitment to promoting life-changing research to prevent, treat, and ultimately cure Type 1 diabetes inspires me.

I want to welcome not only our Ranking Member Senator Casey and Senator Scott from Florida, but also we have a special guest, and that is the co-chair of the Senate Diabetes Caucus, Senator Jeanne Shaheen of New Hampshire, so thank you for joining us here today as well. Let me shorten my opening comments this morning because we do have votes beginning at 11:00 and I want to make sure that we have time to hear from all of our witnesses.

As I said, I want to begin by welcoming the more than 160 children who have traveled to Washington from across the country to share your personal stories. You will tell us what it’s like to live with Type 1 diabetes, just how serious it is, and why it is critical for Congress to fund the research necessary to discover better treatments, more effective technology, and, ultimately, a cure.

Your personal stories really matter. They motivate Senators and members of the House to get involved in the cause. In my case, one of my very first meetings as a brand new Senator was with Maine families with children with diabetes. And I’ll never forget this 10-year-old little boy looking up at me, and he told me that he wished he could take just one day off from having diabetes—his birthday or Christmas—but of course he could not. And that really touched me and it led me to start the bipartisan Senate Diabetes Caucus.

I want to give a special welcome to the two delegates from Maine — Ruby Anderson from Yarmouth, who’s going to be testifying, and Lydia Bryant from Ellsworth. I’m very proud that you are here representing our great state.

Since the last convening of the Children’s Congress two years ago, we have made remarkable strides with new technological discoveries that are already changing lives for people with Type 1 diabetes. We celebrated the FDA approval of an artificial pancreas system for children ages 14 and older. Now the artificial pancreas is also available for kids who are ages 7 to 13, opening the door for better day-to-day management of diabetes.

Today’s research represents tomorrow’s cure. Just last month, a new study, the first of its kind, illustrated the potential of an immunotherapy drug to delay the onset of Type 1 diabetes by an average of two years. What a significant breakthrough.

These advances have only been possible due to our bipartisan commitment to funding diabetes research. Since I founded the bipartisan Senate Diabetes Caucus in 1997, federal funding

for diabetes research has tripled and these research dollars are yielding results. We now spend more than \$1 billion on diabetes research.

The Special Diabetes Program, in particular, has contributed to phenomenal discoveries, especially advancements in technology. This program provides an additional \$150 million each year for T1D research, and another aim of this program is equally important: the Special Diabetes Program also studies diabetes in American Indians and Alaskan Natives, who experience Type 2 diabetes at nearly three times the rate of the national average. So, the SDP is important both for people who have Type 1 and also for Native Americans and Alaskan Natives.

In total, over the past 22 years, the Special Diabetes Program has contributed \$2.8 billion to improve the lives of people with diabetes.

By the end of September, we must pass legislation to reauthorize the Special Diabetes Program and that's what you need to tell all the members of Congress. It has strong bipartisan support, 68 Senators signed a letter to Senate leadership that Senator Shaheen and I authored advocating for this program. I am pleased to report to you that just last week the Senate Health Committee, on which I serve, approved a five year authorization of the SDP. That's the longest authorization ever, so that's really good news.

Finally, let me just say that I am very concerned about the spiraling cost of insulin. The cost of managing diabetes is growing at an alarming rate. Between 2012 and 2016, average insulin spending for patients with Type 1 diabetes nearly doubled. Last year, a father in Maine testified that he turned to drug importation from Canada after the price of a 90-day supply of insulin for his son with Type 1 tripled to \$900.

I am going to put the rest of my statement in the record so that we can expedite the hearing, but let me just end by telling you two things. First, until last fall I had no personal connection at all with Type 1 diabetes. Then, my nephew married a young woman who has Type 1 diabetes and has her own blog. So, I feel like I'm now officially a part of the JDRF family. And second, it is truly inspiring to look out and see this wave of Carolina blue. I did the best I could to come close to matching it, but your passion and hope for a cure are contagious, and together I am confident that we'll continue the progress and achieve that goal.