Testimony by

James “Jimmy Jam” Harris

Songwriter, Producer, Musician and Recording Artist

At the Hearing entitled:

“Accelerating Breakthroughs: How the Special Diabetes Program is Creating Hope for those Living with Type 1 Diabetes”

Wednesday, July 11, 2023, at 10:00 a.m.

Before the

United States Senate

Committee on Appropriations

Dirksen Senate Office Building, Room 106

Washington, D.C.

Thank you, Chair Murray, Vice Chair Collins, Senator Shaheen, and Members of the Committee. My name is Jimmy Jam. I am a songwriter, producer, musician and recording artist. Today, I am honored to be testifying not as a member of the music industry, but as a parent whose family has been impacted by type 1 diabetes every day for the past two decades.

My son Max was just two years old when he was first diagnosed with type 1 diabetes. At the time, though I knew what T1D was, I didn't really understand what it meant.

Type 1 diabetes is something that doesn't affect you until it really affects you. Once it does, you are completely immersed in it. Our lives quickly revolved around Max's diabetes. Late nights working on music became late nights working on music and waking up my son to test and manage his blood sugar levels.

Max is now in his twenties, and we're glad that instead of those constant finger pokes to test him, he now uses a continuous glucose monitor, or CGM. These life-changing devices never would have come to market as quickly as they did – or perhaps even at all – without research funded by the Special Diabetes Program and JDRF's funding and extensive involvement.

But even with great new technologies to help control T1D, we can never take Max's levels for granted. That's the thing with diabetes: the second you think you have it down, something else changes and the number is too high or too low. Congress needs to renew the SDP so that researchers can discover new breakthroughs to help families with type 1 diabetes.

Through Max's eyes, I have also seen the crisis facing millions of Americans: insulin affordability. I remember when Max was young, we went on a family trip to New York, and in the chaos of packing we managed to forget his insulin.

I didn't think it would be a big deal. We had insurance. But then our insurance wouldn't cover it. We had already used our refill, so we ended up having to pay a couple hundred dollars out of pocket just to get his life-saving insulin. We were fortunate we could afford the cost, but even as a child, Max realized the problem. I'll never forget how he asked me that day: "What about the people who can't afford that?"

There are already so many people across the country who can't afford their insulin, and over the years the cost has only gotten higher. People like Max need insulin to survive. I've heard heartbreaking stories of families forced to ration insulin because it is too expensive. Congress should make sure no family has to make these impossible choices to keep their child alive.

Aside from my roles as a father and musician, I am also chairman emeritus of the Recording Academy – the organization behind the Grammy Awards. Like the members of this committee, I know what it’s like to sit in a contentious meeting and worry no one will ever agree because our differences are too great.

But I’ve learned that if I start playing music, I can look around and see the commonalties of everyone’s head nodding the same way. We may all have our differences, but there are things we can all agree on. Music is one of those things.

Type 1 diabetes should be one of those things we can all agree on too. It is a non-partisan condition – diabetes doesn’t care if you’re a Democrat or a Republican. We can all agree that there should be research to improve the lives of those with diabetes. We can all agree that insulin should be affordable for all who need it.

I thank you for the opportunity to join you today. And I’ll be happy to answer any of your questions.