



Make their potential our priority.

Voter Guide to *Think Babies*

Want to Build a Better Future? It Begins with Babies.

The science is clear. Our brains grow faster between the ages of 0-3 than any later point in life. When babies have nurturing relationships with parents and caregivers, enriching early learning experiences, and strong physical health and nutrition, they have a crucial foundation for healthy development. But when babies don't get what their growing brains need to thrive, they face life-long developmental, educational, social, and health challenges.

Even before COVID, public policy did not keep up with the reality of parenting and the challenges that families with young children face. The impacts of the current crisis are hitting families with young children particularly hard, deepening racial and socioeconomic gaps that impact babies even before they are born. We must do more to ensure our policies build a stronger future for *all* babies and toddlers. When we *Think Babies*, we create stronger families, vibrant communities, and a prosperous country.

As a voter, you have the power to educate and elect candidates who are committed to making the potential of every baby our national priority.

In this voter guide, you will find the information and policy solutions you need to *Think Babies* and vote. While many issues being discussed during the election cycle impact babies and families, this voter guide focuses on three key areas that are critical to families with infants and toddlers:

- Affordable, quality child care
- Paid family and medical leave
- Access to health coverage

A graphic on a dark blue background. On the left, a white ballot box is shown with a red outline. Inside the box, at the top, are four stars: two red and two blue. Below the stars are three options: 'Republicans' with an unchecked white checkbox, 'Democrats' with an unchecked white checkbox, and 'Babies' with a checked white checkbox. To the right of the ballot box, the text 'America votes for babies.' is written in white, bold, sans-serif font. In the bottom right corner of the graphic, the 'think babies' logo is repeated in white.

Babies Need Adults to Vote

Think Babies and Vote

With 1 seat in the Oval Office, 35 Senate Seats, 435 House Seats, 11 Governors, and thousands of state and local lawmakers up for election in 2020, voters – like you! – have countless opportunities to evaluate and elect candidates who will make the needs of infants and toddlers their priority. Below are resources on how you can prepare to show up for babies at the ballot box:

1. Confirm Your Voter Registration

You can verify your voter registration by visiting headcount.org and entering some basic information. Follow the necessary steps for your state if you aren't already registered or make any necessary changes prior to your state's deadline.

2. Check out BallotReady.org

Today's candidate could be tomorrow's baby champion. Visit ballotready.org to:

- See every candidate and referendum that will be on *your personal ballot*;
- Learn about the candidates' backgrounds and stances on the issues; and
- Make informed decisions about who and what you will vote for.

3. Make a Plan to Vote and Encourage Families to Do the Same

This year's election is unlike any we have experienced in our lifetime. Having a plan for *how* and *when* you'll cast your ballot can help. Use the prompts below to create a plan for yourself, and then share this resource with families you know and work with so they can do the same. Print out your plan and put it somewhere visible to serve as a reminder!

For more information on where to vote, how to vote, how to vote early, and how to vote by mail, look up your state on headcount.org.

MY VOTING PLAN IS:

I'll vote by (circle one)

- Early voting
- Absentee or mail-in voting
- In-person voting

I'll cast my vote on _____

(DATE)

At this time (check one)

- Before work/school
- After dropping my kids off at school/child care
- During my lunch break
- On my way home from work
- After dinner
- I'm voting by mail – any moment I can catch!

The person who will care for my children is _____

THINKBABIES.ORG



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Babies Need Comprehensive Paid Family and Medical Leave

The time after the birth or adoption of a baby is an essential time of development for babies and families.

Because early relationships nurture early brain connections that form the foundation for all learning and relationships that follow, parents and caregivers are preparing our future workers, parents, and leaders.

Only 21 percent of civilian workers in the United States have access to paid leave through their employers ([U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics](#)). The COVID-19 crisis has shown us that our nation heavily depends on the work of the front-line staff at grocery stores, child care centers, health care facilities – many of whom lack access to comprehensive policies that would protect them in times of illness or crisis.

This means that many parents must make the impossible choice between taking the time they need to bond with or care for their babies and losing their jobs or economic security. Parents also need paid medical leave to take care of themselves and for health situations that require family caregiving beyond welcoming a child to the family. In the pandemic, families also needed time to care for children when schools, work, and child care shut down.



Researchers conservatively estimate that providing 12 weeks of job-protected paid leave in the U.S. would result in nearly 600 fewer infant and post-neonatal deaths per year (State of Babies Yearbook: 2020).

Families need more than the emergency paid leave provisions passed by Congress earlier this year just for the pandemic. As few as 8 states, plus DC, offer paid family leave, a policy that enables families to support the well-being of infants and other family members ([State of Babies Yearbook: 2020](#)). Babies and their families need a permanent, comprehensive paid family and medical leave program that gives them crucial time to foster nurturing relationships that build strong early brain connections and bond with their babies, as well as care for themselves or for family members with serious illnesses.

Working families need comprehensive paid family and medical leave. Strong policy solutions will:

- Be inclusive of all working people, no matter where they live or the nature of their job;
- Provide all workers with comprehensive coverage of personal medical and family caregiving as reflected in the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA);
- Allow sufficient time—at least 12 weeks—away from work to meet their care and health needs;
- Offer adequate wage replacement rates and benefit levels that make taking leave financially possible for everyone; and
- Protect workers from retaliation or adverse employment consequences for requesting or taking leave.

For more information, visit thinkbabies.org/policy-priorities-paid-leave.

Babies Need Quality, Affordable Child Care

Quality child care prepares babies for future learning and success.

Access to quality child care not only offers families a critical support for employment and education, it lays the groundwork for babies' future success, including strong cognitive skills, higher scores on math and language measures, and the social and emotional skills critical to all learning. But quality child care is tough to access and afford, especially for those who need it most, and most infants are in low- or medium-quality care settings that can be detrimental to their development.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, infant-toddler care had long been prohibitively expensive, yet little help was available to pay for it. These challenges have been exacerbated by the current crisis, especially for families hardest hit economically and socially. While the Child Care and Development Block Grant supports child care subsidies in every state, only 14 states allow these crucial subsidies for families with incomes above 200 percent of the federal poverty level. In fact, only 4.2 percent of infants and toddlers in families with low- or moderate-incomes receive this critical support ([State of Babies Yearbook: 2020](#)).



Before the pandemic, 61% of mothers of infants and toddlers were in the workforce.

Other support like the federal child care tax credit does not approach the actual cost of infant-toddler care, even at the maximum benefit level. Moreover, many families with low income don't benefit from it because they have little or no federal income tax liability and it's not refundable.

The pandemic has hit the child care sector incredibly hard, exposing the need for a systemic approach to an essential service still struggling months after the pandemic's initial impact when many programs closed. Some providers are still closed and may never reopen. Additionally, reopening does not lead to financial viability. A recent survey by the [National Association for the Education of Young Children](#) shows that while the majority of providers have reopened, 86 percent report operating far below their capacity. That means they are unable to cover costs, which have also increased. About two-fifths of providers said they are certain they will close permanently without additional financial assistance.

As parents navigate work, care and learning for their children, and the realities of the current crisis, child care programs and professionals need increased public investment to ensure essential care now and the long-term viability of the broader child care system.

We must strengthen the overall services for infants and toddlers, while ensuring that quality is not the privilege of a few.

Working families need quality, affordable child care options now. Strong child care policy solutions will:

- Be properly funded and ensure that every family can enroll their child in a high-quality program;
- Ensure that health and safety standards are maintained in every child care program;
- Provide enhanced federal financial support for services for infants and toddlers to focus on improving quality and access; and
- Guarantee that early childhood professionals in all settings can be paid a living wage and have the materials, resources, and training they need to provide high-quality care and ensure strong health and safety practices.

For more information, visit thinkbabies.org/policy-priorities-child-care.

Babies Need Access to Health Coverage

For the almost 4 million babies born each year in the United States, health care can mean the difference between a strong beginning and a fragile start.

In the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a significant drop in pediatric visits and vaccine rates amongst children living in families with low income - children who already had lower rates of preventive health visits and access to health coverage. Over 5 percent of children under age 3 living in families with low income lack health insurance ([State of Babies Yearbook: 2020](#)). Proposals to change the structure of Medicaid threaten to continue to undo decades of progress on young children's health and could prove devastating to the more than 5 million infants and toddlers covered by Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP).

On average, nearly 6 in 1,000 babies born in the U.S. will not survive to see their first birthday ([State of Babies Yearbook: 2020](#)).

Children's and mothers' access to health insurance during pregnancy and in the first months of life can be the difference between life and death, since coverage is linked to significant reductions in infant mortality, childhood deaths, and the incidence of low birthweight. Young children are more likely to rely on Medicaid than older children and would bear a disproportionate burden when funding is decreased. Additionally, repealing or using a block grant for expansion would leave many parents without coverage. Parents' ability to find and afford coverage affects their own health and ability to parent, as well as the likelihood that their children will be covered.



States that have expanded Medicaid coverage for adults have seen significant increases in the number of babies that also receive that benefit. The largest increases in children with new coverage were those whose parents had recently received coverage as a part of their state expanding Medicaid. Together, Medicaid and CHIP cover more than two in four infants and toddlers ([Georgetown University Center for Children and Families](#)). They also cover more than half of all Black and Latino children ([Kaiser Family Foundation](#)).

Medicaid expansion and CHIP are critical to the health of babies and families because:

- Affordable health care means infants and toddlers can receive the critical screening, services, and treatment they need to build a strong foundation for their futures.
- Poverty is a strong predictor of developmental delays in children. Children living in families with low incomes and uninsured children are more likely than children from other income groups to have poor health and special health care needs. Yet these children are less likely to receive developmental screening.
- Access to regular health care and mental health treatment, especially for women, has been associated with healthier pregnancies and babies. The health of a child and their caregiver are inextricably linked. Extending Medicaid for pregnant women to 12 months postpartum, raising the eligibility levels, and including doula care would help meet the health needs of families.
- Babies need access to physical and mental health coverage that addresses the social determinants of health and developmental needs, including preventative care.
- Medicaid expansion provides a strategy for states to provide health coverage and improve access for parents.

For more information, visit zerotothree.org/policy-and-advocacy/physical-health.