Dear Partner,

On behalf of ZERO TO THREE, we want to thank you for being a part of [*Think Babies*™](https://www.thinkbabies.org/)! We’re excited about your event and the opportunity to work with you to make the potential of every baby a national priority.

We all know the science. Our brains develop faster in the first few years than any later point in life. While our policymakers increasingly recognize the importance of these early years, there’s so much more we can do to give all babies the best chance to succeed in life. *Think Babies* is a call to action for policymakers to prioritize the needs of infants, toddlers, and their families and invest in our future.

At the federal level, our priorities are:

* Child Care;
* Paid Leave;
* Early Head Start;
* Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health;
* Family Support; and
* Economic Security.

Decisions that affect babies and families happen at all levels of government. That is why ZERO TO THREE has created a set of a tools and resources to help interested state and local organizations host *Think Babies* events that raise awareness with policymakers about the needs of infants, toddlers, and their families, such as:

* [***Strolling Thunder*TM**](https://www.thinkbabies.org/strollingthunder/),the flagship advocacy event of the *Think Babies* campaign, which brings constituent families to meet with their elected officials – from state capitals to Capitol Hill – and share their experiences about what it’s like to raise young children today and what they need to support their baby’s healthy development.
* **Advocacy training** for parents, service providers, and other interested stakeholders to increase advocacy engagement and advance *Think Babies* policy priorities.
* **Site visits with policymakers** which provide an opportunity to show policymakers up close the services that make a difference for infants, toddlers, and their families.
* **Listening sessions with parents** of children 0-3 and elected officials which offer an opportunity to help elected officials understand what infants, toddlers, and families in their community need to thrive.
* **Policy forums**, which convene stakeholders such as policymakers, experts, advocates, and families, to highlight what babies need to get the care and support they need to thrive and the role of specific policy solutions.

In this toolkit, you’ll find key messages and talking points, template language for your communications channels, and materials and resources to support your *Think Babies* events.

Thank you for your commitment to Be a Big Voice for Little KidsTM. We’re thrilled to work with you to advance policies that benefit babies and toddlers across the country.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth DiLauro

Senior Director of Advocacy

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*Think Babies* Key Messages and Talking Points

ZERO TO THREE has conducted public opinion research to determine the best way to present the science as we make the case to policymakers and influencers that babies must be an urgent, national priority. Below is sample language from which to pull for materials, presentations, and any conversation you may have about *Think Babies*.

**The Science**

* An investment in strong, healthy development for babies, is an investment in America’s future – because babies build America.
* The science is clear. Our brains grow faster between the ages of 0 and 3 than any later point in life, forming more than one million new neural connections every second.[[1]](#footnote-1)
* Our brains are built. The experiences we have in our earliest years lay the groundwork for the rest of our lives. Foundational skills are developed first, such as language, sensory, and motor skills. These form a strong base onto which other skills, like problem solving, self-regulation, and complex social skills are built.
* A baby’s beginning lays the foundation for all to come. When babies have nurturing relationships, positive early learning experiences, and good health and nutrition, those neural connections are stimulated and strengthened, laying a strong foundation for the rest of their lives[[2]](#footnote-2).
* When babies don’t get what their growing brains need to thrive, they don’t develop as they should. This leads to life-long developmental, educational, social, and health challenges[[3]](#footnote-3).

**The Need**

* There are 12 million infants and toddlers in the U.S.[[4]](#footnote-4) Each of these young children is born with unlimited potential.
* Babies are America’s future. They are the next generation of engineers, teachers, farmers, small business owners, and policymakers. *Think Babies* and invest in our future today, because babies build America.
* Babies are our nation’s infrastructure. When we invest in babies and their families, we invest in our future workers, innovators, leaders, and our success as a nation. And only when we ensure equitable opportunity for every baby to reach their full potential will we be able build a strong foundation for our country.
* The [*State of Babies Yearbook*](https://stateofbabies.org/)*[[5]](#footnote-5)* shows that the profile of America’s babies and families is more diverse than at any point in our history, with more than half (51 percent) of babies being children of color
* But opportunities to grow and flourish are not shared equally by all infants, toddlers, and families, reflecting past and present systemic racism and barriers to critical resources.
* Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, 42 percent of babies lived in families without enough income to make ends meet. By nearly every measure, children living in poverty and Black and brown families face the biggest obstacles—low birthweight, unstable housing, and limited access to quality early learning experiences. The life-altering impact of these disparities begin even before they are born.[[6]](#footnote-6)
* Every parent wants to give their child a strong start in life. But the experience of the pandemic has laid bare what families already knew: Our systems for supporting the health and well-being of young children and families are threadbare.
* We must rebuild our nation’s infrastructure to pave the way into the future. Policies meant to support babies and families are riddled with potholes, further compounded by the pandemic and economic devastation. Patchwork solutions will not fill our gaping holes. Sound policies that invest in the potential of every baby will strengthen our communities and our nation.
* As our nation recovers and rebuilds, we need to lay a strong foundation for the future. Policies that support babies and families are proven to deliver a return far greater than their cost – and every dollar we put toward infant and early childhood programs is not only an investment in today’s children and families, but the infrastructure necessary for our communities and country to thrive in the future.
* Every dollar we invest in infant and early childhood programs will return great benefits for our children and our country. Research shows that high quality care, starting at birth, can yield a 13 percent return every year through better outcomes in education, earnings, and health.
* We cannot simply try to get back to the old normal if our nation is to thrive. We must build for the future and ensure that every baby has what they need to reach their full potential.

**About *Think Babies***

* ZERO TO THREE created *Think Babies* to bring attention to what babies and their families need to thrive. *Think Babies* is a call to action for policymakers to prioritize the needs of infants, toddlers, and their families and invest in our nation’s future. Babies are our nation’s infrastructure. When we invest in babies and their families, we invest in our future workers, innovators, leaders, and our success as a nation. Yet opportunities to grow and flourish are not shared equally by all infants, toddlers, and families, reflecting past and present systemic racism and barriers to critical resources. Only when we ensure equal opportunity for **every** baby to reach their full potential will we be able build a strong foundation for our country.
* We’re advocating for the issues that ensure all babies have good health, strong families, and positive early learning experiences. At the federal level, our priorities are:
* Child Care;
* Paid Leave;
* Early Head Start;
* Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health;
* Family Support; and
* Economic Security.
* Core elements of the campaign include:
  + *Strolling ThunderTM*: Strolling Thunder brings constituent families to meet with their elected officials – from state capitals to Capitol Hill – and share their experiences about what it’s like to raise young children today and what they need to support their baby’s healthy development.
  + *State Partners*: *Think Babies* supports state partners with with advocacy resources and technical assistance to advance their infant-toddler policy priorities. A growing number of states across the country are leveraging *Think Babies* to build the political will necessary to make babies our national priority. *National Partnerships*: This campaign is powered by a growing network of advocates and partners across the country urging policymakers to Think Babies. We’re working together to educate policymakers and ensure that all babies and their families get the support they need to thrive.
  + *Digital Organizing*: *Think Babies* partners and advocates engage in a drumbeat of highly visible digital organizing activities to raise awareness among policymakers about the issues facing families with young children and translate that awareness into action.
  + *State of Babies Yearbook*: The *State of Babies Yearbook* provides national and state-by-state data on the well-being of America’s babies. Policymakers and advocates can use the data to identify and act on the challenges facing the youngest members of society.

***Think Babies* “Elevator Pitch”**

The science is clear. Our brains grow faster in the first few years than any later point in life, forming more than 1 million new neural connections every second. When babies have nurturing relationships, positive early learning experiences, and good health and nutrition, those neural connections are stimulated and strengthened, laying a strong foundation for the rest of their lives. When babies don’t get what their growing brains need to thrive, they don’t develop as they should. This leads to life-long developmental, educational, social, and health challenges.

Opportunities to grow and flourish are not shared equally by all infants, toddlers, and families, reflecting past and present systemic racism and barriers to critical resources. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, 42 percent of babies lived in families without enough income to make ends meet. If our nation is to thrive, we must build for the future and ensure that every baby has what they need to reach their full potential.

That’s why ZERO TO THREE created *Think Babies*, a call to action for federal and state policymakers to prioritize the needs of infants, toddlers and their families and invest in our future. We advocate for policies that ensure all babies and their families have good health, strong families, and positive early learning experiences. Sign up to join the team that’s fighting for our future at [www.thinkbabies.org](http://www.thinkbabies.org/).

***State of Babies Yearbook “Elevator Pitch”***

The [*State of Babies Yearbook*](https://stateofbabies.org/) is a resource that seeks to bridge the gap between science and policy with national and state-by-state data on the well-being of America’s babies. The *Yearbook* provides a snapshot of how babies are faring nationally and by state across nearly 60 indicators and policy domains in areas essential for a good start in life: Good Health, Strong Families, and Positive Early Learning Experiences. States are ranked into 1 of 4 tiers based on how they fare on selected indicators and policy domains that represent their progress towards assuring babies’ access to health care, paid leave, quality early learning and more. The *Yearbook*shows us that, even before the pandemic, the littlest among us face big challenges, and the policies and programs int heir state can make a difference in their ability to reach their full potential. Most alarming, significant disparities across key indicators of well-being emphasize the big barriers babies of color face.

The data are clear: the state where a baby is born makes a big difference in their chance for a strong start in life. All states need to do better for babies. Even among states with high averages, significant disparities exist in the opportunities available to babies and families of color to thrive, often driven by historical and structural inequalities. By nearly every measure, children living in poverty and children of color face the biggest obstacles, such as low birthweight, unstable housing, and limited access to quality child care. The current crisis has further exposed and exacerbated these disparities and structural barriers, which have harmful and life-altering effects that begin even before birth and can last a lifetime.

**Policy Solutions to Advance *Think Babies* Priorities**

The talking points below will help you communicate the needs of babies, toddlers, and their families, as well as the brain science that supports the need for policy solutions that advance equitable outcomes for babies and their families. The following policy solutions support the four priorities of the *Think Babies* campaign: quality, affordable child care, time for parents to bond with and care for their babies; healthy emotional development; and strong physical health and nutrition.

**Quality, Affordable Child Care**

* Quality child care feeds a baby’s growing brain, building the foundation for the development necessary for them to thrive as adults.[[7]](#footnote-7)
* Access to quality child care can set low-income children on a path to:
* Higher reading and math achievement;
* Complete elementary and high school on time;
* Attend and complete college;
* Increased earnings;
* Greater employment; and
* Better health as adults.[[8]](#footnote-8)
* Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, child care and other early learning opportunities for infants and toddlers fell far short of what children and families need. In particular, research indicates that children of color are likely to lack equitable access to high-quality formal early care and learning experiences.
* High quality child care that supports babies' healthy development includes nurturing relationships with caregivers, continuity of care, and a competent and well compensated workforce. Families with low-incomes face a variety of obstacles to accessing quality care including cost, availability by location, and for non-standard hours care.[[9]](#footnote-9)[[10]](#footnote-10)
* Infant-toddler care, especially high-quality care, is prohibitively expensive. With infant-toddler care costing more than college in 30 states and the District of Columbia, we know families feel the pinch of the high cost of care.[[11]](#footnote-11)
* Despite the high cost of infant care, few families receive financial assistance for it. Only 4.2 percent of infants and toddlers in families with low-or moderate-incomes are served by the Child Care and Development Fund.[[12]](#footnote-12)
* Individual states set eligibility levels for child care subsidies. Currently only 13 states allow child care subsidies for families with incomes above 200 percent of the federal poverty level which was $3,620 per month for a family of 3 in 2020.[[13]](#footnote-13)
* COVID-19 has stressed the already fragile economics on which child care operates and radically changed the child care landscape in our country. Many providers have been forced to close, are coping with under-enrollment and slow growth due to smaller classes, and fewer children returning because of continued high unemployment or parents’ concerns about putting their children back in group settings.
* As the child care system rebuilds following the COVID-19 crisis, it cannot go back to what it was. Robust public funding is imperative for a system of high-quality programs and providers that is accessible to all families. Any policy solution must be built on principles that will ensure it serves the needs of the current and future workforce:
* **Quality**: All children receive high-quality child care;
* **Access**: Families can access the high-quality child care setting that best meets their needs;
* **Affordability**: Families get the financial support they need to afford high-quality child care; and
* **Workforce**: Early childhood professionals in all settings can receive the support, resources, and compensation they need to provide high-quality care and support their own families.xv

**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[[14]](#footnote-14), parents and caregivers are on the front line of preparing our future workers, parents, and leaders.
* A baby’s beginning lays the foundation for all to come. For babies, every minute and every interaction is a lesson in how the world works, how they are valued, and how people relate to one another. Caring, consistent relationships experienced by young children help establish a child’s ability to learn, to form positive relationships, to exercise self-control, and to mitigate stress.[[15]](#footnote-15)
* 85 percent of working people in the United States do not have access to paid leave through their employers.[[16]](#footnote-16) That means that many parents must make the impossible choice between taking the time they need to bond with and care for their babies and losing their jobs or economic security.
* Paid leave is essential for allowing families to take time off if their children have a serious health need or a family member gets sick.
* When babies have serious health needs, having their parents there can improve their recovery. Having that time can also help parents learn how to best care for their sick children.[[17]](#footnote-17)
* The lack of a permanent national paid family and medical leave policy disproportionately impacts Black and Latinx families, due to historical barriers created by discriminatory policies that prevent many families of color from building the wealth needed to cope with family events requiring time off from work. Disparities are compounded by the fact that families who depend upon part-time work or the gig economy are often excluded from existing paid and unpaid leave policies.
* The COVID-19 pandemic brought our country’s caregiving crisis to the forefront. In the absence of a national paid family and medical leave policy, many families were left without means of financial support. Some had to make difficult choices for their children’s care because they simply could not do without a paycheck and were unable to take the time off to meet those family needs.
* While emergency paid family and medical leave was created through the Families First Coronavirus Response Act, it is only a temporary solution. Despite robust (84 percent) support from votersxx, the U.S. does not have a permanent paid family and medical leave program.
* As of January 2021, only 9 states and DC have passed paid leave laws or ballot initiatives.[[18]](#footnote-18)
* Policymakers must invest in a comprehensive national paid family and medical leave insurance program that embodies the following core principles:
* Accessibility for all working people;
* A meaningful length of leave — at least 12 weeks;
* Coverage for the full range of medical and family caregiving needs established in the Family and Medical Leave Act;
* Affordability and cost-effectiveness for workers, employers and the government;
* Inclusivity in its definition of “family”; and
* Protections against employer retaliation when workers utilize their right to take leave.[[19]](#footnote-19)

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**Early Head Start**

* Early Head Start is an evidence-based and community-driven program that supports the healthy development of babies, toddlers, and pregnant people living in poverty to ensure that all children have the same opportunities to succeed.
* Early Head Start is the only federal program specifically focused on the early development and learning experiences of babies and toddlers living in families with incomes below the poverty line. Currently, it reaches only 7 percent of eligible children and families.[[20]](#footnote-20)
* As a two-generation program, Early Head Start creates opportunities for both parents and children, helping parents improve their prospects for economic security while simultaneously ensuring their children are on a solid path from the earliest age to engage in lifelong learning.
* Early Head Start programs:
* Provide child development services through early childhood education settings (high-quality centers or family child care homes meeting Early Head Start requirements) or weekly home visits with program staff. Local agencies determine the program options that will best serve eligible children and families in their communities;
* Address the multiple risks of poverty through a full range of individualized services for young children and their families, including child development, health and mental health, nutrition, and family support services; and
* Conduct annual community assessments to ensure the programs offer the most meaningful program options to address local family needs, identify resources and gaps in services, and reach the families that are most in need.
* Early Head Start research shows success for children and parents:
* Children in Early Head Start showed positive impacts at ages 2 and 3, including enhanced cognitive and language skills, decreased aggressive behaviors, increased engagement with parent during play, and increased rates of immunization.[[21]](#footnote-21)
* Early Head Start provides parents with the resources they want and need to support their children's development and their families' economic wellbeing. Research has shown that parents in Early Head Start were more emotionally supportive, provided more support for children’s language development and learning, and were less likely to use harsh discipline strategies such as spanking. Enrollment in Early Head Start also promoted parents’ participation in education and training as well as their employment.[[22]](#footnote-22)
* Positive impacts on children’s development were still evident two years later upon entry into kindergarten. In particular, children who followed Early Head Start with formal pre-K programs between the ages of 3 and 5 fared the best.[[23]](#footnote-23)
* Throughout COVID-19, stable federal funding allowed Head Start and Early Head Start programs to maintain their staff and remain in touch with families to provide some services. As our country continues to weather the pandemic, Early Head Start services could be critical to helping families living in poverty to recover.
* Policymakers should increase investment in Early Head Start, both through increased federal investment and the direction of more state resources to comprehensive infant-toddler programs meeting Early Head Start standards, to reach more pregnant women, serve all income-eligible infants and toddlers, and expand services for children at greatest need of developmental services.[[24]](#footnote-24)

**Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Services**

* Infant and early childhood mental health (IECMH) refers to how well a child develops socially and emotionally from birth to age 5.
* IECMH is defined as the capacity of a child from birth to age 5 to:
* Experience, express and regulate emotions;
* Form close, secure interpersonal relationships; and
* Explore his/her environment and learn, within the context of family and cultural expectations.
* Parents and caregivers influence babies’ social and emotional development from the start. As early as 3 months—well before a baby utters his or her first words—babies experience a whole range of emotions like joy, sadness, anger, interest, and excitement. Children who feel loved, comforted, and have the freedom to play form more brain connections, which increases their ability to trust, relate, communicate, and learn.[[25]](#footnote-25)
* Positive early childhood experience promotes resilience (the ability to “bounce back” from adversity) and healthy emotional development.[[26]](#footnote-26)
* Young children experience mental health issues at roughly the same rate as older children, ranging from 10-16 percent.[[27]](#footnote-27)
* Young children who live in families dealing with parental loss, substance abuse, mental illness, or exposure to trauma are at heightened risk of developing IECMH disorders and the stressors of poverty can multiply these risks.[[28]](#footnote-28)
* More than 8 percent of infants and toddlers have already had two or more adverse experiences.[[29]](#footnote-29)
* If untreated, IECMH disorders can have detrimental effects on every aspect of a child’s development (i.e., physical, cognitive, communication, sensory, emotional, social, and motor skills) and the child’s ability to succeed in school and in life.[[30]](#footnote-30)
* Early prevention and treatment are more beneficial and cost-effective than attempting to treat emotional difficulties and their effects on learning later on.[[31]](#footnote-31)
* National surveys of families with young children found stress and anxiety levels rising in families with young children throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, creating risk of trauma and social-emotional problems.
* The increased stress resulting from the lack of adequate support for families has contributed to adverse mental health outcomes for parents and caregivers, which has a direct correlation to poorer mental health and development for infants and toddlers.[[32]](#footnote-32)
* Our country lacks the national structure to provide foundational mental health services to the youngest children. Policymakers can strengthen the foundation being built for infants and toddlers by investing in the continuum of services that support the prevention of infant and early childhood mental health problems, as well as the provision of developmentally appropriate treatment services for infants and young children suffering from mental health disorders, including the development of a highly skilled and adequately funded clinical workforce.[[33]](#footnote-33)

**Economic Security**

* Young children grow and learn in the context of their families and communities. Ensuring family and community level economic security is fundamental to creating the environment in which young children thrive, laying the groundwork for our next generation of workers and leaders.
* Research indicates that adequate income in the early years can boost positive development, with long term impacts on adult earnings.[[34]](#footnote-34)
* Work alone may not be enough to lift a family out of poverty or help them reach economic security. The federal minimum wage yields only $15,080 in annual income. That is not enough to lift even a 2-person family out of poverty.
* Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, 42 percent of babies lived in families without enough income to make ends meet, often as the result of historic and structural inequities.
* 1 in 5 babies lived in poverty, but Black infants and toddlers are more than 3 times more likely to live in poverty as white infants and toddlers.
* Hispanic infants and toddlers are more than twice as likely to live in poverty as white infants and toddlers.[[35]](#footnote-35)
* Families of color, in particular Black and Latinx families, particularly experience not just an income gap but a “wealth gap” or a difference in families’ assets such as savings accounts or home equity. For example, the median Black family has about one-tenth the wealth of the median white family ($17,600 compared with $171,000), the cumulative effect of structural racism that has led to lower earnings, fewer opportunities to accumulate assets through home ownership and savings, and less access to tax benefits.[[36]](#footnote-36)
* Cash enables families to provide for basic needs, such as diapers to keep a baby dry and healthy, gas or bus fare to get to a job, and household supplies for daily life. The only federal program providing direct assistance to families, the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), reaches a little more than one in five families with an infant or toddler living in poverty.[[37]](#footnote-37)
* Policymakers can help build an economic system that would ensure families have enough income to make ends meet and nurture their children by:
* Ensuring a minimum wage of $15/hour;
* Increasing the federal and state Earned Income Tax Credit;
* Creating a child allowance by enhancing the federal Child Tax Credit for young children; and
* Helping close the wealth gap with “Baby Bonds”.[[38]](#footnote-38)

**Child Welfare**

* Every year in the United States, nearly 200,000 infants and toddlers experience abuse or neglect. Infants and toddlers have the highest rates of abuse and neglect of any age group, at 16 per 1,000 children ages 0 to 2.[[39]](#footnote-39)
* A third of children entering foster care each year are under age 3.[[40]](#footnote-40)
* Racial disparities are glaringly apparent, as Black and American Indian children are placed in foster care at rates disproportionate to their share of the population. Black infants and toddlers stay in foster care longer: 1 in 5 infants and toddlers remains in foster care for more than a year but 23.4 percent of Black infants and toddlers do so, compared with 18.7 percent of white infants and toddlers.[[41]](#footnote-41)
* Young children who experience maltreatment–and too often the instability of life in foster care–have a high likelihood of significant and detrimental impacts on their emotional and cognitive development, with lasting effects.
* A survey of state child welfare practices for infants and toddlers found that most states do not have policies in place that promote the positive, healthy development of the young children in their care.[[42]](#footnote-42)
* Approaches grounded in prevention and support for family resilience are necessary to meet the developmental needs of babies and toddlers.
* The current structure of the child welfare system provides limited resources to address early childhood development and multi-generational trauma. In addition, an emphasis on crisis removal of children makes the system ill-suited to provide babies and toddlers with the stability and nurturing relationships they need for a strong start in life.
* Policymakers can transform child welfare policy and practice through:
* Promoting state policies and local approaches, such as Safe Babies Court Team™, that we know affect better outcomes for babies and families;
* Enhancing court oversight and collaborative problem-solving;
* Ensuring health equity through expedited screening and assessment; and
* Strengthening and supporting families and embedding early childhood development principles in child welfare systems and practices.[[43]](#footnote-43)

**Voluntary, Evidence-Based Home Visiting**

* Parents play the most active and significant role in their babies’ healthy development. Voluntary, evidence-based home visiting is a proven strategy to support parents in nurturing their children.
* Research shows that parents want support to nurture their young children’s healthy development. They want resources that can teach them about the importance of early brain development and how they can nurture their babies to set them up for a healthy life.[[44]](#footnote-44)
* Quality, voluntary home visiting leads to fewer children in social welfare, mental health, and juvenile corrections systems, with considerable cost savings for states. Research shows home visiting can be an effective method of delivering family support and child development services.[[45]](#footnote-45)
* Voluntary home visiting programs tailor services to meet the needs of individual families and offer information, guidance, and support directly in the home environment. While home visiting programs vary in goals and content of services, in general, they combine parenting and health care education, child abuse prevention, and early intervention and education services for young children and their families.
* Trained home visitors partner with families to help them meet their own goals to promote their young children’s healthy development.
* High-quality home visiting programs can:
* Increase children’s school readiness;[[46]](#footnote-46)
* Enhance parents’ abilities to support their children’s overall development;[[47]](#footnote-47)
* Improve child health and development;[[48]](#footnote-48)
* Improve family economic self-sufficiency;[[49]](#footnote-49) and
* Produce a substantial return on investment.[[50]](#footnote-50)
* Parenting is difficult under the best of circumstances. Families facing obstacles that impact their ability to fully support their baby’s development, such as those caused by poverty, their own adverse childhood experiences, or social or geographic isolation, can benefit from the supports provided through voluntary home visiting programs.
* Even before COVID, less than 2 percent of families with infants and toddlers who could benefit from evidence-based home visiting are receiving those services.[[51]](#footnote-51) Unemployment resulting from the pandemic means that the number of eligible families who could benefit, particularly, in this time of high stress, is increasing.
* Throughout COVID-19, home visitors have worked to adapt to social distancing from the families they usually support in the home, moving to virtual “telehealth” type visits, working with state and federal regulators to facilitate this adaptation.

**Affordable, Quality Health Care**

* Access to affordable health care means infants and toddlers can receive the critical services and treatment they need to build a strong foundation for their futures.
* Medicaid covers almost half of births in this country, and Medicaid and the Children’s Health Insurance Program insure about 1 in 3 children, but the rate of uninsured children is on the rise after years of decline. Young children more than anyone need access to preventive care.
* Babies in families with low income and babies of color are less likely to receive preventive health services. Overall, 91.1 percent of infants and toddlers had a preventive medical care visit within the past year.
* Babies in families with low income (87.7 percent) had significantly lower rates than babies in families above low income (93.4 percent).
* Babies of color are much less likely to have well-child visits than white infants and toddlers, who had a rate of 94.9 percent, compared with 87 percent for Black infants and toddlers, and 83.7 percent of Latinx infants and toddlers.[[52]](#footnote-52)
* On average, 6 in 1,000 babies born in the U.S. will not survive to see their first birthday. Mortality is more than twice as high for Black infants (11.1 per 1,000 births) as it is for white infants (4.8) and is slightly higher for Hispanic infants (5) than for white infants.[[53]](#footnote-53)
* 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.[[54]](#footnote-54)
* Children with Medicaid coverage are more likely than uninsured children to regularly see a doctor and receive preventive health care[[55]](#footnote-55)￼ Routine checkups and preventive care, such as vaccinations, help prevent more costly health issues as children get older.
* Medicaid coverage for parents supports strong families by allowing them to access health care services that they would not be able to afford otherwise, including services related to substance use and mental health services.[[56]](#footnote-56)
* Research shows that children enrolled in Medicaid in early childhood have better long-term health, educational, and employment outcomes than those who are uninsured.[[57]](#footnote-57)
* Medicaid expansion has been associated with lower rates of infant mortality in states that adopted that policy.[[58]](#footnote-58)
* As a result of COVID-19, fewer families with young children were seeing their primary care practitioners, and vaccination rates and well-child visits dropped.[[59]](#footnote-59) This preventive care lag could leave young children at risk for other serious diseases.

**Child and Family Screenings and Supports**

* Parents have the greatest impact on their child’s development. The better able we are to connect and provide parents with support, resources, and guidance, the greater the positive impact on children.
* Early identification of developmental issues, partnered with a system of supports to intervene, can help children access the services they need to reach their full potential. Early intervention can make the difference between a strong start and a fragile beginning for children who have or are at risk for developmental delays.
* Approximately 1 in 4 children under age 5 are at moderate or high risk for developmental or behavioral delays.[[60]](#footnote-60)
* Yet only 30 percent of infants and toddlers, ages 9 to 35 months, received a developmental screening in the past year.[[61]](#footnote-61) And fewer than 50 percent of children facing a developmental disability or disabling behavioral problem are identified before they start school.[[62]](#footnote-62)
* Poverty is a strong predictor of poor developmental outcomes in children. Low-income children are more likely than children from other income groups to have poor health and special health care needs that place them at risk of developmental delays.[[63]](#footnote-63) Yet these children are less likely to receive developmental screening.[[64]](#footnote-64)
* Uninsured children are less likely to receive developmental screenings and preventive health care than children enrolled in public insurance programs such as Medicaid or the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP).[[65]](#footnote-65)
* The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that the cost of providing special education services to a child with significant hearing loss is $11,006 per year. Early detection and treatment could greatly reduce this expense. Children whose hearing loss is detected in infancy and who receive treatment services have better language outcomes at 8 years of age.[[66]](#footnote-66)
* Maternal depression and anxiety disorders affect approximately 10 percent of mothers with young children.[[67]](#footnote-67) Left untreated, these disorders have been associated with adverse birth outcomes and poor mother-child bonding.[[68]](#footnote-68) Early screening and identification of maternal depression offers long-term health care cost savings and helps support healthy child development and maternal health.[[69]](#footnote-69)

**Nutrition Services**

* Access to nutrition support programs is essential for infants, toddlers, and pregnant people to receive nutritious food, which is particularly important during this time period of rapid growth and development.[[70]](#footnote-70)
* Research over 4 decades has demonstrated that nutrition assistance directly targeted at young children and pregnant women is effective in reducing the likelihood of low birth weight, infant mortality, and childhood anemia, as well as improving diet quality and nutrient intake, initiation and duration of breastfeeding, cognitive development and learning, immunization rates, and use of health services.[[71]](#footnote-71)
* Research on the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and

Children (WIC) has found statistically significant declines in the prevalence of obesity among 2- to 4-year-olds.[[72]](#footnote-72)

* Children under 3-years-old who are overweight are no more likely to be overweight in adulthood than children who are not overweight, but 3-year-olds who are overweight are likely to be overweight in adulthood.[[73]](#footnote-73)
* Before COVID, 16 percent of households with infants and toddlers experienced low or very low food security. Food insecurity is associated with a variety of adverse health and development outcomes.[[74]](#footnote-74)
* As many as one in 12 babies (8.2 percent) is born at low birthweight, which can jeopardize their development.[[75]](#footnote-75) The rate of Black women at risk for having low weight births (14.1 percent) is more than twice that for white women (6.9 percent); the rate for Hispanic women (7.5 percent) is 9 percent higher than the rate for white women.[[76]](#footnote-76)
* Data from early in the COVID-19 pandemic showed that more than 2 in 5 households with children under age 12 were food insecure.[[77]](#footnote-77)

**System Building and Collaboration**

* Well-designed state early childhood systems are essential for delivering the services to infants, toddlers, and their families that are high-quality, coordinated, and targeted to meet families’ needs.
* Unfortunately, the patchwork array of early childhood programs currently operating in states are typically housed across various state agencies with multiple funding sources which hinders the effectiveness of supports for infant and toddler development and may make it challenging to for policymakers to use funds efficiently and to track outcomes over time.
* Inadequate system infrastructure and mechanisms for collaboration may result in in uneven quality and inconsistent eligibility requirements across programs; difficulty for families in learning about and accessing services; and professionals facing uneven access to professional development resources.
* In addition to improving families’ access to comprehensive, high-quality programs, a well-designed and implemented early childhood system increases the ability of states to work cross-sector to promote important goals, such as better supporting young children with special needs and English language learners, engaging parents, and promoting children’s health and mental health.
* Key components of state early childhood systems include:
* **Governance**: Consolidated management of programs serving young children in the same agency or office to better coordinate program management and service delivery;
* **Data Systems**: Coordinated data systems that link data both across various infant-toddler programs, and with longitudinal education data;
* **Screening and Referral Systems:**A cross-sector system of screening and referrals for young children to detect children’s needs early on through common screening tools and ensure that families are referred to needed services;
* **Early Learning Guidelines**: Early learning guidelines serve as a foundation to inform programming for young children across systems, describing what children may know and do across multiple domains of learning during specific age ranges.
* **Quality Rating and Improvement Systems**:  A systemic approach to assessing and improving the quality of early care and education programs;
* **Workforce Development**: A coordinated state approach to workforce development to help to professionalize and support the infant-toddler workforce across sectors; and
* **Financing**: a systemic approach to financing services for infants and toddlers.

***Strolling Thunder***

**Introduction**

*Strolling ThunderTM* is the flagship advocacy event of *Think BabiesTM*. It’s a day when babies, toddlers, and their families meet with their policymakers and urge them to *Think Babies*—for stronger families, vibrant communities, and a prosperous country. *Strolling Thunder* focuses on policy solutions that ensure all babies and families have they need to thrive including:

* Good Health;
* Strong Families; and
* Positive Early Learning Experiences.

The key element of any *Strolling Thunder* event is creating the opportunity for families with children ages 0-3 to connect with their elected officials to share their stories about what they need to support their baby’s healthy development. Events can focus on policymakers at any level of government from federal, to state, to city or county. These direct connections between families and policymakers are powerful and help policymakers understand how their decisions impact real families they represent.

We recommend that events include a brief rally program, whether in person or virtual, and a designated time for individual meetings between families and their policymakers. Beyond that, events can look a lot of different ways – this is an opportunity to get creative! Past successful state and local *Strolling Thunder*s have included activities like holding an actual “stroll” where families march with strollers, photo booths that provide great content for social media, policymakers reading to children, a model early learning center in the state legislative building, and more.

We are so glad that you have decided to bring *Strolling Thunder* to your community! The following resources will help you to plan and execute your event.

In this section you will find:

* FAQs and Answers
* Sample Timeline
* Tips for Planning a *Strolling Thunder* Rally and/or Stroll
* Sample Speaker invitation
* Sample Rally invitation
* Recruiting Families for *Strolling Thunder*
* Sample Family Waiver
* Partner Engagement Opportunities
* Holding *Strolling Thunder* Meetings with Policymakers
* Sample *Strolling Thunder* Leave Behind
* Earned Media Materials
* Social Media Assets

***Strolling Thunder* FAQs and Answers**

**How does my *Strolling Thunder* event complement ZERO TO THREE’s national *Strolling Thunder* event?**

Each spring, ZERO TO THREE brings families from all 50 states and the District of Columbia to Capitol Hill to share their stories with their Members of Congress. Events for 2020 and 2021 were held virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We encourage you to host your *Strolling Thunder* near the time of the national event in Washington, D.C. or during your state legislative session to amplify the *Think Babies* message, both for policymakers and the media. This toolkit provides resources and assets to help you plan. Information about this year’s event can be found[here](https://www.thinkbabies.org/strollingthunder/).

**What is the best way to encourage families to travel to visit with their policymakers?**

Many parents are excited about the opportunity to share their experiences with policymakers and to talk about what it means to raise young children today. It’s a personal issue that’s near and dear to them. Parents of babies and toddlers are juggling a lot, so it is helpful to provide them with support planning logistics, financial assistance, and/or an extra hand to help with their kids, if possible. The best time to hold a *Strolling Thunder* event is during regular business hours during session on a weekday to ensure that you can meet with policymakers or their staff. We understand this may be a challenging time for families to attend an event. As a result, we’ve found that paying for reasonable travel expenses—gas mileage or transportation, meals, and hotel (if staying overnight)—to be an effective incentive. And for many families a trip can be a fun, educational opportunity.

You can also encourage parents’ participation by offering parenting resources to help them best support their babies’ brain development. Finally, parents may appreciate the opportunity to ask questions of one another and share their knowledge of what has worked in supporting their young children.

**Can we host a virtual *Strolling Thunder* event?**

Yes. The COVID-19 pandemic has upended the lives of families with infants and toddlers and disrupted the services and systems they rely on. Educating policymakers about what babies need to thrive has never been more important. While traditional in-person *Think BabiesTM*events may not be feasible in the near future, virtual events are emerging as an effective and timely way to advance *Think Babies*priorities. Many states have held virtual *Strolling Thunder* events during this time. To help support you holding virtual a *Think Babies* event, ZERO TO THREE created a [Think Babies Virtual Event Guide](https://www.thinkbabies.org/think-babies-events/think-babies-virtual-events/) which complements the other tools, resources, and templates included in the *Think Babies* Events Toolkit.

**Should we have families sign a waiver?**

Yes. Once you have families on board, you will want to have them sign a release form (see example later in toolkit), which will give you permission to share families’ stories with reporters, through social channels, and on your website.

**Sample Timeline**

Here is a sample timeline to help you think through the sequence of planning your *Strolling Thunder* event.

**8 Weeks Out or More**

* Confirm your *Strolling Thunder* date and location
* Begin engaging priority partners to participate

**7 Weeks Out**

* Identify the policymakers with whom you want to meet
* Begin identifying families to participate in *Strolling Thunder*
* Conduct outreach to reporters to announce *Strolling Thunder*
* Announce *Strolling Thunder* on social media
* Continue engaging partners to participate

**6 Weeks Out**

* Continue identifying families to participate in *Strolling Thunder*
* Continue engaging partners to participate
* Confirm collateral materials needs and begin developing materials
* Build excitement for the event on social media

**5 Weeks Out**

* Finalize families who will participate in *Strolling Thunder*and help them think through the stories they want to tell their policymakers
* Finalize partnership commitments around *Strolling Thunder*
* Continue to build excitement for the event on social media

**4 Weeks Out**

* Begin outreach to schedule meetings with policymakers
* Begin conducting earned media outreach to pitch families’ stories to local reporters
* Continue to build excitement for the event on social media

**3 Weeks Out**

* Continue outreach to schedule meetings with policymakers
* Continue to conduct earned media outreach to pitch families’ stories to local reporters
* Draft an op-ed (with partners as appropriate)
* Continue to build excitement for the event on social media
* Encourage families to begin social media posting

**2 Weeks Out**

* Continue outreach to schedule meetings with policymakers
* Continue to build excitement for the event on social media
* Continue to encourage families to post to social media
* Finalize the op-ed

**1 Week Out**

* Tease *Strolling Thunder* on social media
* Distribute social media materials to partners to conduct outreach
* Continue to build excitement for the event on social media
* Pitch the op-ed

**Week of *Strolling Thunder***

* Conduct training with families ahead of their policymaker meetings
* Hold policymaker meetings to educate them on issues important to infants, toddlers, and families
* Conduct earned and social media outreach around *Strolling Thunder*
* Thank policymakers via social media for holding meetings with families during *Strolling Thunder*

**1-2 Weeks Following *Strolling Thunder***

* Send formal thank you notes to policymakers for meeting with families during *Strolling Thunder*, highlighting any media coverage.
* Thank families for participating in *Strolling Thunder*
* Thank partners for participating in *Strolling Thunder*
* Highlight results from *Strolling Thunder* via social media and in follow up media outreach

**Tips for Planning a *Strolling Thunder* Rally and/or Stroll**

Kick off your meetings with policymakers with a rally or add a stroll around your state capitol or other venue to bring together families, partners, elected officials, reporters, and others to raise awareness about what babies and families need to thrive and garner additional attention to your event.

* **Identify and invite speakers.** Reach out to potential speakers for your rally who can speak to the policy or issue(s) you’re focused on. In addition to representatives of your organization, some ideas for speakers include:
  + State and local elected officials who are champions on these issues
  + Leaders of partner organizations
  + Direct service providers
  + Parents of babies and toddlers
  + Messengers who can speak to the long-term effects of investing in babies and toddlers, such as business leaders, law enforcement, military leaders, and/or educators

Please refer to template speaker invitation email.

* **Plan your program.** Develop a “run of show” or a schedule that times out the speaker presentations and provide each speaker with a general sense of what you would like them to address. Try to limit speaker times to two-minute remarks and no more than three to five speakers. Keep in mind that you’ll have a young crowd and they may not be quiet during the remarks. The entire speaking program should ideally run less than 20 minutes.
* **Plan your location and check location permits.** Identify a location that will accommodate the number of people you want to gather—and potentially one that is symbolic of the message you want to send to your policymakers. If you’re holding the event outside, make sure to have a rain plan! Moreover, many public venues will require permits if you’re hosting a rally. Make sure you check what permits you need as early as possible in your planning and give yourself as much time as you can to allow for any unexpected steps in the permit process. You may also need a police presence, particularly if you are planning a stroll that requires crossing streets and traffic. Check with your permitting organization to learn if this is required.
* **Think about the audio and visual.** Coordinate with the venue staff or outside vendors to have AV equipment like microphones, speakers, a podium, and lighting (if needed) available for your rally. Think about what the visuals of the rally will look like—is there a location where you can get a nice background shot of the capitol or city government building and position speakers?
* **Send out invitations.** Once you’ve secured your speakers and your location, send invitations out to your network to build a crowd. See template invitation language to your rally or stroll included in this toolkit.
* **Invite reporters to your event.** You’ll want to raise awareness of your event beyond the people attending. Invite reporters to cover your event. If families will speak, pitch their stories to local reporters. Additional details are located in the Earned Media Materials section of this toolkit, including a template media advisory.
* **Make the event comfortable for families.** Families are an important group to include in your rally or stroll. After all, they’re the ones bringing the babies! Keep them comfortable at the event – are there built in seats or places to let kids crawl or walk around in a shady place? Bring food and water supplies if you can, and some event entertainment for children (such as bubbles, balls, and even coloring materials) to keep them occupied as the program is going on.

*Strolling Thunder* Key Messages and Talking Points

The following message materials will help you communicate about *Strolling Thunder* as you plan for and hold your event in your state or community. Use the talking points to recruit families to tell their stories; engage coalition members and other early childhood advocates in the event; and explain why policymakers must *Think Babies*.We’ve also included an elevator speech, which you can repurpose as content on your website.

Core Messages

* [ORGANIZATION] is joining ZERO TO THREE’s *Think Babies* campaign to bring *Strolling Thunder* to [STATE/LOCAL AREA] on [DATE].
* Families from across [STATE/LOCAL AREA] will share their stories with our [POLICYMAKERS/OTHER COMMUNITY LEADERS] and urge them to *Think Babies*—for stronger families, vibrant communities, and a prosperous country.
* The science is clear: our brains grow faster between the ages of 0 and 3 than at any later point in our lives. The experiences we have in our earliest years lay the groundwork for the rest of our lives.  When we invest in babies and their families, we invest in our future workers, innovators, leaders, and our success as a state and a nation. And only when we ensure equitable opportunity for every baby to reach their full potential will we be able build a strong foundation for our country.
* Be part of the team that’s fighting for our future. Learn more at [WEBSITE] and sign up at [www.thinkbabies.org](http://www.thinkbabies.org).

Talking Points

* The science is clear: our brains grow faster between the ages of 0 and 3 than at any later point in our lives.
* Decisions that affect babies and families happen at all levels of government, not only in Washington, D.C.
* That’s why [ORGANIZATION] is urging our policymakers to *Think Babies*. We’re bringing *Strolling Thunder*—the flagship advocacy event of the campaign—to [STATE/LOCAL AREA] on [DATE].
* Families from across [STATE/LOCAL AREA] will share their stories with our [POLICYMAKERS/OTHER COMMUNITY LEADERS] and urge them to *Think Babies*—for stronger families, vibrant communities, and a prosperous country.
* It’s all part of the *Think Babies*effort that ZERO TO THREE created to bring attention to what babies and their families need to thrive including good health, strong families, and positive early learning experiences. We are focused on [SELECT POLICY PRIORITIES FROM LIST BELOW AND INSERT RELEVANT MESSAGE POINTS DESCRIBING WHY IF PRIOIRITIES HAVE BEEN SELECTED]:
* Quality, Affordable Child Care
* Paid Family and Medical Leave
* Early Head Start
* Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Services
* Economic Security
* Child Welfare
* Voluntary, Evidence-Based Home Visiting
* Affordable, Quality Health Care
* Child and Family Screenings and Supports
* Nutrition Services
* We know that the state where a baby is born makes a big difference in their chance for a strong start in life. Overall, [STATE] ranks in the [1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th] tier looking at areas essential to give our babies the best beginning, but all states have room to grow. [FIND YOUR STATE RANKING [HERE](https://stateofbabies.org/states/)]
* When we *Think Babies* and invest in infants, toddlers, and their families, we ensure a strong future for us all. Learn more at [WEBSITE] and sign up at [www.thinkbabies.org](http://www.thinkbabies.org).

Elevator Speech

The science is clear: our brains grow faster between the ages of 0 and 3 than at any later point in our lives. We need to tell our policymakers to *Think Babies*—for stronger families, vibrant communities, and a prosperous country. Yet opportunities to grow and flourish are not shared equally by all infants, toddlers, and families. That’s why we are bringing babies and families from across [STATE/LOCAL AREA] to [STATE/LOCAL AREA] for *Strolling Thunder* on [DATE]. Families will share their stories with our [POLICYMAKERS/OTHER COMMUNITY LEADERS] and encourage them to support policies such as [STATE/LOCAL PRIORITIES]. It’s all part of *Think Babies*from ZERO TO THREE, a call to action for federal and state policymakers to prioritize the needs of infants, toddlers and their families and invest in our future.  Join us— learn more at [WEBSITE] and sign up at [www.thinkbabies.org](http://www.thinkbabies.org/).

**Sample Speaker Invitation Email**

Subject: Join Us—Rally to Highlight the Importance of Baby/Toddler Brain Development

Dear [NAME],

As someone who is focused on issues affecting babies and toddlers [INSERT MORE SPECIFICITY IF NECESSARY], I am reaching out to invite you to participate in a rally to support families with children ages 0 to 3.

As you likely know, the first three years of babies’ lives have an enormous impact on how they learn and grow throughout their lifetime, with more than one million new neural connections forming every second. And you know what’s at stake: When babies have nurturing relationships, positive early learning experiences, and good health and nutrition, those neural connections are stimulated and strengthened, laying a strong foundation for the rest of their lives. But when babies don’t get what their growing brains need to thrive, they don’t develop as they should. This leads to life-long developmental, educational, social, and health challenges.

Given [YOUR/YOUR ORGANIZATION’S FOCUS ON EARLY CHILDHOOD ISSUES], I am reaching out to invite you to speak at [ORGANIZATION’S] *Strolling Thunder*TM event, part of ZERO TO THREE’s *Think Babies*™ effort, to bring national attention to what babies and families need to thrive: [INSERT STATE/LOCAL POLICY ISSUES].

Every day, our policymakers make decisions that affect our work and the children and families we serve and our community’s future. I’d like to set up a time to talk more about your involvement in this important event.

Thank you,

[NAME]

**Sample Rally Invitation Language**

**Join us for *Strolling Thunder*TM [STATE/ LOCAL AREA]**

[ORGANIZATION] is bringing babies and parents from [GEOGRAPHIC DIVERSITY] to call attention to what babies—and families—in [STATE/LOCAL AREA] need to thrive. Giving all babies a strong start in life yields significant returns in the long run through more years of education, more employment, and better health as an adult. We’re heading to [CITY/CAPITAL] to tell [POLICYMAKERS] to *Think Babies*TM—for stronger families, vibrant communities, and a prosperous country and future.

**About *Think Babies***

ZERO TO THREE created *Think Babies* to bring attention to what babies and their families need to thrive. *Think Babies* is a call to action for policymakers to prioritize the needs of infants, toddlers, and their families and invest in our nation’s future.

 The science is clear: Our brains grow faster between the ages of 0 and 3 than at any later point in our lives. What happens in these early years lays the foundation for future learning, behavior, and health. But far too many babies face persistent hardships that undermine their ability to grow and thrive. This leads to lifelong developmental, academic, social, and health challenges that impact us all.

Our future begins with babies. Think Babies is a call to action for policymakers to prioritize the needs of infants, toddlers and their families and invest in our country’s future.

For more event details, visit: [WEBSITE].

Recruiting Families for *Strolling Thunder*

Parents with children ages 0 to 3 are some of the strongest advocates for babies and toddlers. And as constituents, they have the ear of their policymakers when sharing their stories and advocating for what they as parents need to be successful. Here are some suggestions to help you recruit families to participate in your *Strolling Thunder* event.

**Tips to Engage Families**

How you recruit families depends on the number you want to engage and your direct access to them. As you think about criteria for recruiting families, we encourage you to think about geographic, economic, racial, and issue diversity as well as residency in target districts. Here are a few suggested strategies:

* Make the ask in person to parents with whom you interact on a daily basis.
* Work with partner organizations who interact directly with parents, or to expand your reach to other areas of your state.
* Send out a request through your social media channels and e-newsletter.

Depending on your screening process, you may want to ask families the questions in the next section to ensure their stories align with your policy priorities. Once you have families on board, you will want to have them sign a release form (see example below), which will give you permission to share families’ stories with reporters, through social channels, and on your website.

**Ask Questions to Engage Families**

We have used the following questions to recruit a diverse group of families; get a sense of parents’ stories; and assess their ability to share their stories and needs with policymakers so you have a sense of how you can support them. You can use these questions as a script or send them in a Word document to families to provide written answers.

* Tell me about your family, particularly your baby or toddler.
* What has been one of the more challenging parts of parenthood/guardianship?
* What have you noticed about your baby’s development recently? How did they learn it?
* Thinking about your own experience, what types of support do you feel all parents/guardians need to be successful?
* Tell us about programs that have supported your baby and family.
* Why do you think it is important for your policymakers to *Think Babies*?
* Do you have a personal experience or story you’d like to share as part of *Strolling Thunder*?
* How are you an advocate for babies and families in your community and in your state?

**Tips to Support Parents during *Strolling Thunder***

Families with babies and toddlers are at the heart of every *Strolling Thunder* event, but it can be challenging for parents to travel with their infants and toddlers and spend the day or afternoon meeting with policymakers. For virtual events, navigating technology can be a challenge. Here are a few tips to help make your *Strolling Thunder* event go smoothly for parents.

* Be respectful of the routines parents have for their children, but encourage them to stick to your *Strolling Thunder* agenda as much as possible. It can be a long and unpredictable day but remind parents that it’s okay if their babies get fussy in a meeting with a policymaker—it’s a vivid illustration of what babies need!

* Consider conducting an in-person training with parents ahead of meetings with policymakers. We recommend covering the following in the training:
* Review key messages (no more than 4, short and sweet);
* Review “asks” of policymakers, and if relevant, advocacy/lobbying guidelines;
* Review meeting materials and each parent’s story;
* Provide an overview of your state capitol/meeting spaces; and
* Role play meeting with policymakers and have families practice telling their story.

* Prepare a schedule of meetings or activities and other important materials for parents, such as a map of the state house or city council, and guidance on the best way to get around if parents will be traveling to meetings on their own. Be sure to prepare a printed packet for them to reference with everything they need at their fingertips (and one less thing to think about).

* Encourage parents to take brief notes about their story to have on-hand in meetings with policymakers. While you won’t want parents to read from a “script,” many families will appreciate having notes.

* Make sure you have a dedicated group of staff or volunteers who are available that day to help families. Give parents contact information for someone on your staff who will be accessible throughout the day in case they have questions, or something comes up during the *Strolling Thunder* event.

* Give parents advance information about the dress code for meetings and reassure them that nothing special is necessary. This is something they think and care about.

* Give recommendations where parents can get family-friendly meals during the day. Also, consider making some baby supplies available, like diapers, wipes, and other essentials as well as age-appropriate healthy snacks and beverages for parents and children to grab and go.

* For virtual events, it's important to take time to prepare families before your event so they know exactly how things will go logistically. Help them think about a place where the lighting is good, and they feel comfortable about the background. Consider sharing with families the option to use a background if they feel uncomfortable having their home visible. Also, expect to play the part of tech support to families participating in your event. If you are planning a live event or meeting, schedule practice time to ensure that all technology is working, and families feel comfortable with it. For more tips for engaging families during a virtual event, visit our *Think Babies*Virtual Events: [Tips for Engaging Families Toolkit.](https://www.thinkbabies.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Virtual-Events-Tips-for-Engaging-Families.docx)

Strolling Thunder Waiver and Release from Liability

*Families should sign a release form to give you permission to share families’ stories with reporters, through social channels, and on your website. The sample template below can be modified for your event.*

[ORGANIZATION]

***STROLLING THUNDER* WAIVER AND RELEASE FROM LIABILITY**

In consideration of being able to participate in the [ORGANIZATION] *Strolling Thunder*TM event being held in [LOCATION] from [DATE] to [DATE] (“*Strolling Thunder*”), the undersigned, for myself, and on behalf of my child who is attending *Strolling Thunder*, hereby agree to the following Waiver and Release from Liability (the “Release”):

The undersigned hereby releases, waives, agrees not to sue, and further agrees to indemnify, defend, and hold harmless ZERO TO THREE, its’ officers, directors, agents, employees (the “ZERO TO THREE Parties) and [ORGANIZATION], its officers, directors, agents, employees (the “[ORGANIZATION] Parties”), with respect to any liability, claims(s), demand(s), cause(s) of action, damages, loss or expense (including court costs and reasonable attorney’s fee) of any kind or nature which may arise out of, result from, or relate to my participation, and/or my child’s participation, in *Strolling Thunder*, including claims for liability caused in whole or in part by the negligence of the [ORGANIZATION] Parties. The undersigned further agrees that if, despite this Release, I, or anyone on my behalf or my child’s behalf, makes a claim for liability against any of the [ORGANIZATION] Parties, I will indemnify, defend and hold harmless each of the [ORGANIZATION] Parties from any such liabilities which may be incurred as the result of such claim.

The undersigned understands and agrees that my participation is voluntary.

The undersigned also grants [ORGANIZATION] the right to make reasonable use of my and/or my child’s likeness without obligation to pay us for such use in connection with advertising, promotion and/or publicity.

The undersigned hereby warrants that I have read this Release carefully, understand its terms and conditions, and intend for my signature to serve as confirmation of my complete acceptance of the terms, conditions and provisions of this Release.

Name of Participant: Name of Participant:

Participant’s Signature: Signature of Participant:

Name of Child: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Name of Child: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Name of Child: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Name of Child: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Date:

Partner Engagement Opportunities

* **Attend the *Strolling Thunder* event (and recruit others to join!).** More people—and a range of parents, early childhood providers and experts, and relevant community leaders (such as law enforcement, medical providers, etc.)—will make for a stronger *Strolling Thunder*event. Encourage key partners to participate by: offering a speaking role; including their organization name on signage, materials you distribute, and in earned and social media outreach; and/or formally thanking them in your remarks.

* **Co-sponsor or provide in-kind support.**Partnering with relevant organizations such as libraries, local service providing agencies, and advocacy organizations can be a great way to broaden the reach of your event and share the work of putting on *Strolling Thunder*.

* **Recruit families to share their stories.** Some partners may have connections to parents of young children and can identify or refer parents who might have relevant stories to share with their policymakers. You can recognize these partners’ efforts on your website, through social media outreach, and by highlighting to policymakers and earned media outlets the programs that support these parents.

* **Serve as a third-party validator in earned media outreach.**Spokespeople and organizations from respected and/or different fields who are working to better support families—such as medical providers, law enforcement officers, and business leaders—can reinforce the importance of investing in children ages 0 to 3. Connect with partners to see if they would be willing to include a quote in your *Strolling Thunder* press release and/or be available for interviews with reporters.

* **Sign on to an op-ed or blog post.** Similar to serving as a media spokesperson, consider connecting with partners to co-sign an op-ed or blog post related to why policymakers should *Think Babies*and support the policy priorities you have identified.

* **Share *Strolling Thunder* announcements via e-newsletters and/or website.** Partners can help encourage individuals and organizations through their networks to participate in and share information about *Strolling Thunder* through their e-newsletters and website. Use the Elevator Speech to provide content that partners can drop into their materials.

* **Support *Strolling Thunder* through your social channels.**Regardless of whether partners engage in *Strolling Thunder* in other ways, encourage them to share information about the event and the *Think Babies*message through their social media channels. Suggested content, including template posts and social graphics, is included below in the Social Media Outreach section.

**Tips for Holding a Day of Meetings with Policymakers**

When planning for and holding a day of meetings with your local, state, or federal policymakers, whether in the state legislature or city council, or with federal policymakers when home and working in-district or virtually, we offer some suggestions to support your outreach to them and while participating in meetings.

* It’s possible your policymaker’s office will ask to hold the meeting on another day. We recommend that all legislative meetings occur on the same day for maximum exposure and concentration of your message.

* To encourage the policymaker to attend the meeting rather than a staff member, it’s helpful to emphasize that a constituent family with a baby/toddler is traveling to meet with the policymaker. Share simple details, such as a baby’s age and name, to reinforce that the baby is a constituent, too.

* Depending on your organization’s capacity, it is ideal to have each family participate in legislative meetings with someone from your or a partner’s organization. This way, the family can focus on sharing their story and their needs, while you can highlight the brain science and lead relevant policy discussions.

* These meetings will be short, and with policymakers having multiple priorities, your meeting may start late or need to end a little early. Encourage families to practice their story and be able to say the key points in two minutes.

* You can further prepare families by giving guidance on what to do if a legislator asks the family a question. For example, if a legislator asks what he/she can do to support families, the family can prepare an answer based on the focus of their individual story and needs. And be sure to tell families that if they don’t have an answer to a legislator’s question, that’s ok! Your organization can provide an answer from your perspective and/or you/the family can follow up with more information at a later date.

* During meetings, we find it’s helpful to ask the policymaker or staff if they are parents or grandparents to reinforce why this information is relevant to them as elected officials and in their personal life.

* It can be tricky to have a baby or toddler in a meeting with a policymaker. Embrace the chaos and use it as an opportunity to make links to what all children need to thrive! *(Example: [BABY] seems unsure of going to you and prefers to stay with her parents. That demonstrates how important it is for babies’ development to be surrounded by their caring parents and other trusted caregivers. When babies don’t have close, loving relationships with parents and caregivers, they are unsure of whether their needs will be met and live in an aroused state of fear and insecurity. This elevates stress for extended periods of time and interferes with healthy brain growth.)*

* Share with the policymaker or staff relevant business cards and a leave behind (available at the end of this toolkit) towards the end of the meeting.

* Take a photo with the policymaker (or staff members if the policymaker cannot attend) and family together. If the meeting is virtual, take a screen shot. These images will be important for social media and further promotions.

**Leave Behind for Policymakers**

The following sample language can be used to craft your own leave behind to give to policymakers and staff and during meetings with families. This text can be modified to reflect your organization’s priorities.

The science is clear that our brains grow faster between the ages of 0 and 3 than any later point in our lives, forming more than one million new neural connections every second. When babies have nurturing relationships, positive early learning experiences, and good health and nutrition, those neural connections are stimulated and strengthened, laying a strong foundation for the rest of their lives. When babies don’t get what their growing brains need to thrive, they don’t develop as they should. This leads to life-long developmental, educational, social, and health challenges.

**It’s time to invest in the future.**

We need to invest in the first three years of life to ensure that all babies and families have what they need to thrive including good health, strong families, and positive early learning experiences. In [STATE] key areas of investment include:

* [ADD BULLETS WITH STATE POLICY SOLUTIONS, SEE THINK BABIES KEY MESSAGES AND TALKING POINTS FOR POLICY AREA SPECIFIC LANGUAGE]

It’s time to bring national attention to what babies—and families—need to thrive.Be part of the team that’s fighting for our future. Learn more at [WEBSITE] and sign up at [www.thinkbabies.org](http://www.thinkbabies.org/).

**About Babies in [STATE/COMMUNITY]:**

 The [*State of Babies Yearbook*](https://stateofbabies.org/) is a resource that seeks to bridge the gap between science and policy with national and state-by-state data on the well-being of America’s babies. The *Yearbook* provides a snapshot of how babies are faring nationally and by state across nearly 60 indicators and policy domains in areas essential for a good start in life: Good Health, Strong Families, and Positive Early Learning Experiences. States are ranked into one of four tiers based on how they fare on selected indicators and policy domains that represent their progress towards assuring babies’ access to health care, paid leave, quality early learning and more. The *Yearbook*shows us that, even before the pandemic, the littlest among us face big challenges, and the policies and programs in their state can make a difference in their ability to reach their full potential. Most alarming, significant disparities across key indicators of well-being emphasize the big barriers babies of color face.

The data are clear: the state where a baby is born makes a big difference in their chance for a strong start in life. All states need to do better for babies. Even among states with high averages, significant disparities exist in the opportunities available to babies and families of color to thrive, often driven by historical and structural inequalities. By nearly every measure, children living in poverty and children of color face the biggest obstacles, such as low birthweight, unstable housing, and limited access to quality child care. The current crisis has further exposed and exacerbated these disparities and structural barriers, which have harmful and life-altering effects that begin even before birth and can last a lifetime.

In [STATE/ COMMUNITY]:

[INSERT RELEVANT DATA POINTS FROM YOUR [STATE PROFILE](https://stateofbabies.org/states/)]

**For more information, please contact**:

[NAME, TITLE, ORGANIZATION]

[PHONE NUMBER] | [EMAIL]

**Earned Media Materials**

**Overview**

*Strolling ThunderTM*will be strengthened by your ability to capitalize on your existing relationships with reporters around the state or community and build new ones to spread the *Think BabiesTM* message through state and local news outlets. Each local media market will be different, but you may find success reaching out to reporters who cover policy or politics, health, education, family, or lifestyle. Having reporters cover your event can provide the needed surround sound to reach your policymakers, further engage coalition partners, and help activate parents.

There are a few key moments when you can engage reporters:

* Announce your *Strolling Thunder* event and date to let policymakers know you are coming to them. We’ve included a template press release below to help you.
* Share an advisory to invite reporters to the main event.
* The second template press release is to promote your *Strolling Thunder* on the day of your event.
* Place an op-ed, potentially co-signed with a partner organization or family participating in *Strolling Thunder*. A template version is below. Note that this language could be repurposed into a blog post.
* Pitch families to local media outlets to share their stories. It’s helpful for families to know what’s expected of them when talking to reporters. We outlined some tips and message points to help you prepare them.

***Strolling Thunder* Event/Date Announcement News Release**

News Release

*For immediate distribution*

******

Media contact: [NAME]

[PHONE NUMBER] [EMAIL ADDRESS]

[ORGANIZATION WEBSITE]

**[ORGANIZATION] Brings Families to [CITY/CAPITAL] through *Strolling Thunder***

**to Tell Policymakers to Make Every Baby a Priority**

*Event is part of ZERO TO THREE’s national Think Babies campaign to bring attention to what babies and families need to thrive.*

**[CITY, STATE]** ([MONTH] [DATE], 20XX) — [ORGANIZATION] is ready to take [CITY/STATE CAPITAL] by storm, as it holds its inaugural *Strolling ThunderTM* event on [DATE] AT [LOCATION IF APPLICABLE]. [ORGANIZATION] will bring families with young children to speak with their policymakers about making the potential of every baby in [STATE/COMMUNITY] a priority.

*Strolling Thunder* is the flagship advocacy event of  *Think BabiesTM*  to bring national attention to the many issues that affect what babies and families need to thrive. Key campaign priorities include policies that ensure all babies and families have good health, strong families, and positive early experiences.

[INSERT LOCAL ORGANIZATION QUOTE ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF BRINGING BABIES AND TODDLERS TO SPEAK WITH POLICYMAKERS AND WHAT THE ORGANIZATION HOPES TO ACHIEVE THROUGH THE DAY].

[ORGANIZATION] is focused on [POLICY PRIORITIES AND HOW THEY WILL SUPPORT BABIES AND TODDLERS]. In doing so, [ORGANIZATION] encourages residents in [STATE/COMMUNITY] to become part of the team that is fighting for our future. Additional information on *Think Babies*and *Strolling Thunder* activities can be found at [ORGANIZATION WEBSITE HYPERLINK].

###

**About [ORGANIZATION]**

*[INSERT BOILERPLATE COPY HERE].*

**About *Think Babies***

 ZERO TO THREE created *Think Babies* to bring attention to what babies and their families need to thrive. *Think Babies* is a call to action for policymakers to prioritize the needs of infants, toddlers, and their families and invest in our nation’s future.

 Babies are our nation’s infrastructure. When we invest in babies and their families, we invest in our future workers, innovators, leaders, and our success as a nation. Yet opportunities to grow and flourish are not shared equally by all infants, toddlers, and families, reflecting past and present systemic racism and barriers to critical resources. Only when we ensure equal opportunity for **every** baby to reach their full potential will we be able build a strong foundation for our country.

*Learn more at thinkbabies.org or follow @ZEROTOTHREE on Twitter.*

**Media Advisory to Invite Reporters to Your Event**

Media Advisory

*For immediate distribution*

****

Media contact: [NAME]

[PHONE NUMBER] [EMAIL ADDRESS]

[ORGANIZATION WEBSITE]

**Join Babies and Parents from Across [STATE/LOCAL COMMUNITY] as They to Urge Policymakers to *Think Babies***

*[ORGANIZATION] leads families in advocating for [POLICY PRIORITIES]*

**[CITY, STATE]** ([MONTH] [DATE], 20XX) — [ORGANIZATION] is leading parents from [GEOGRAPHIC BREADTH] of [STATE/COMMUNITY] on [DATE] to urge their policymakers to make babies’ care and development a priority in 20XX and beyond. [NUMBER] of parents will be [IN CITY/AT STATE CAPITAL] with their infants and toddlers to participate in *Strolling Thund*erTMto increase their elected representatives’ awareness about [POLICY ISSUES] and highlight why policymakers must *Think BabiesTM*. There [IS/ARE] [NUMBER] event(s) open to the media:

**WHAT:**[EVENT DESCRIPTION]

**WHO:**

* [SPEAKER 1]
* [SPEAKER 2]
* [SPEAKER 3]
* [SPEAKER 4]

**WHEN:**[TIME, TIME ZONE], [DATE]

**WHERE:**[LOCATION]

**RSVP:**[NAME] at [EMAIL]

###

**About [ORGANIZATION NAME]**

*[INSERT BOILERPLATE COPY HERE].*

**About *Think Babies***

 ZERO TO THREE created *Think Babies* to bring attention to what babies and their families need to thrive. *Think Babies* is a call to action for policymakers to prioritize the needs of infants, toddlers, and their families and invest in our nation’s future.

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 Babies are our nation’s infrastructure. When we invest in babies and their families, we invest in our future workers, innovators, leaders, and our success as a nation. Yet opportunities to grow and flourish are not shared equally by all infants, toddlers, and families, reflecting past and present systemic racism and barriers to critical resources. Only when we ensure equal opportunity for **every** baby to reach their full potential will we be able build a strong foundation for our country.

*Learn more at thinkbabies.org or follow @ZEROTOTHREE on Twitter.*

***Strolling Thunder* Day-of News Release**

News Release

*For immediate distribution*

******

Media contact: [NAME]

[PHONE NUMBER] [EMAIL ADDRESS]

[ORGANIZATION WEBSITE]

**Parents and Babies from Across [STATE/COMMUNITY] Come to [CITY/STATE CAPITAL] to Urge Policymakers to *Think Babies***

*[ORGANIZATION] leads families in advocating for [POLICY PRIORITIES]*

**[CITY, STATE]** ([MONTH] [DATE], 20XX) — Parents from [GEOGRAPHIC BREADTH] of [STATE/COMMUNITY] will be [IN CITY/AT STATE CAPITAL] with their infants and toddlers today, [DATE], to urge their elected representatives to make babies’ care and development a priority in 20XX and beyond.

This *Strolling ThunderTM* event, organized by [ORGANIZATION], aims to increase legislators’ recognition about [POLICY PRIORITIES].

[INSERT LOCAL ORGANIZATION QUOTE ABOUT THE BRAIN SCIENCE AND THE POSITIVE RESULTS WHEN FAMILIES HAVE WHAT THEY NEED TO THRIVE].

In [STATE/COMMUNITY], parents will deliver that message directly when they [DESCRIBE *STROLLING THUNDER* ACTIVITY(IES) THAT INVOLVE ENGAGING WITH POLICYMAKERS]. The goal of the event is to emphasize why making young children’s potential a priority benefits [STATE/COMMUNITY], and impacts everything from economic development to long-term health.

[INSERT RELEVANT RESEARCH RELATED TO POLICY PRIORITIES AND WHY THEY ARE IMPORTANT].

But families without the social and economic resources to provide their babies and toddlers with positive, nurturing experiences are at a disadvantage. Nearly half of America’s babies live in or near poverty, which can undermine brain development. Giving all babies a strong start in life increases graduation rates, improves the quality of the workforce and improves health.

Following *Strolling Thunder*, [ORGANIZATION] will continue to educate the public and policymakers on the need for improvements in a wide range of supportive policies, including by mobilizing advocates across the nation. Additional information on *Think BabiesTM*and *Strolling Thunder* activities can be found at [ORGANIZATION WEBSITE HYPERLINK].

###

**About [ORGANIZATION NAME]**

*[INSERT BOILERPLATE COPY HERE].*

**About Think Babies**

 ZERO TO THREE created *Think Babies* to bring attention to what babies and their families need to thrive. *Think Babies* is a call to action for policymakers to prioritize the needs of infants, toddlers, and their families and invest in our nation’s future.

 Babies are our nation’s infrastructure. When we invest in babies and their families, we invest in our future workers, innovators, leaders, and our success as a nation. Yet opportunities to grow and flourish are not shared equally by all infants, toddlers, and families, reflecting past and present systemic racism and barriers to critical resources. Only when we ensure equal opportunity for **every** baby to reach their full potential will we be able build a strong foundation for our country.

Learn more at thinkbabies.org or follow @ZEROTOTHREE on Twitter.

**Template Op-Ed for *Strolling Thunder***

**[STATE/COMMUNITY] policymakers must make babies and toddlers a local priority**

*By [NAME] and [NAME]*

[INSERT BRIEF STORY/ANECDOTE FROM *STROLLING THUNDER* FAMILY THAT DEMONSTRATES THE CHALLENGES].

The science is clear—our brains grow faster between the ages of 0 and 3 than at any later point in our lives, making more than one million new neural connections every second. When babies have nurturing relationships, positive early learning experiences, and good health and nutrition, those neural connections are stimulated and strengthened, laying a strong foundation for the rest of their lives. But when babies don’t get what their growing brains need to thrive, they don’t develop as they should. This leads to life-long developmental, educational, social, and health challenges.

That’s why [ORGANIZATION] is joining the *Think BabiesTM* campaign to host *Strolling Thunder*TM in [CITY/STATE CAPITAL] and bring parents from [GEOGRAPHIC BREADTH] of [STATE/COMMUNITY] to urge their elected representatives to make babies’ care and development a priority in 20XX and beyond. It’s all part of the *Think Babies*effort to call on all policymakers to invest in infants, toddlers, and their families.

In [STATE/COMMUNITY], we have seen firsthand the [DETAIL CHALLENGES AFFECTING FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN AGES 0 TO 3, AND HOW THIS AFFECTS THEIR HEALTH AND FUTURE POTENTIAL— We know that the state where a baby is born makes a big difference in their chance for a strong start in life. Overall, [STATE] ranks in the (1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th) tier looking at areas essential to give our babies the best beginning, but all states have room to grow. [FIND YOUR STATE RANKING AS WELL AS INDIVIDUAL DATA POINTS [HERE](https://stateofbabies.org/states/)]

[FAMILY NAME], and all of our families in [STATE/COMMUNITY], need [DETAIL SUPPORTS AS THEY RELATE TO PARTNER POLICY PRIORITIES].

That’s why we need our policymakers to *Think Babies*—by [INSERT CALL TO ACTION]. Doing so will [INSERT POSITIVE FUTURE OUTCOME FOR CHILDREN AND STATE/COMMUNITY AS A WHOLE].

Learn more at [WEBSITE].

*[NAME] is the [TITLE] of [ORGANIZATION]. [NAME] is the [TITLE] of [ORGANIZATION].*

###

Media Tips for *Strolling Thunder* Participants

Your personal story about you and your children is one of the most powerful the most important things you can share. Here are a few tips that can help you prepare for an interview with the media.

***Tips for Telling Your Story***

* **Be YOU.** Use language you are comfortable with. Talk in your own voice. If you are emotional, that’s ok! These are powerful and important issues.
* **Keep it short (and simple).** Your story doesn’t have to be long and complicated and neither do your sentences. Keep it short, and impactful. For example,
* Talk about when you first became parent and the challenges you faced—whether it was the need for time off, extra support to meet your child’s needs, or finding quality affordable childcare.
* Talk about a challenge your child faced and the help you needed to get for you and your child.
* Share a success or a challenge that may still exist and explain the help you need.
* **Practice**. Practice the exact story you want to tell before you get on the phone with the reporter. Maybe write it down, practice on your phone, or talk to a friend.

***Tips for Working with Reporters***

* Relax. The reporter wants to write a good story. They are interested in you and why you are coming to [CITY/STATE CAPITAL].
* Remember, the reporter can use anything you say in his/her story.
* If you don’t know the answer to a question, that’s ok! Let the reporter know you don’t know the answer and direct them back to [ORGANIZATION]. You do not have to answer any questions you are uncomfortable with.
* If the reporter contacts you directly and you’re not ready to be interviewed, ask them their deadline and if you can return their call. If something comes up and you need to reschedule or call the reporter back, that’s fine. Just be sure you stay in touch so he or she knows when to expect an interview.
* Thank the reporter at the end of the interview! Ask him/her if there is anything else he/she needs.
* When the story runs, feel free to email the reporter and thank him/her again.

***Key Messages***

*Strolling Thunder* is all about telling our policymakers to *Think Babies* for stronger families, vibrant communities, and a prosperous country. Here are a few messages that you can include in your interviews:

* Babies’ brains grow faster between ages 0 to 3 than at any other later point in their lives. This has enormous impact on their future.
* Investing in the brain development of babies is one of the most important things we can do to raise healthy, well-rounded adults. Families like mine want and need supports so we can help lay the foundation for our children’s later learning and success.
* We’re calling on policymakers to [ORGANIZATION TO REVISE BASED ON YOUR POLICY PRIORITIES] to ensure all babies and families have:
* Good Health
* Strong Families
* Positive Early Learning Experiences

**Social Media Assets**

**Social Media Posts to Promote Your *Strolling Thunder* Event**

**[If you are hosting a virtual *Strolling Thunder*Event, click**[**here**](https://www.thinkbabies.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Virtual-Events-Sample-Social-Media.docx)**to view Sample Social Media Content for Virtual Events]**

**Posts to Announce Your *Strolling Thunder* Date**

* We’re excited to announce #StrollingThunder—we’re going to [CITY/STATE CAPITAL] to tell our policymakers it's time to #ThinkBabies.
* The babies are coming! We’re counting down to [DATE] to bring #StrollingThunder to [CITY/STATE CAPITAL]. Get ready to #ThinkBabies, [POLICYMAKERS].

**Posts to Preview Your Event**

* **Two Weeks Before:**We’re just two weeks out from #StrollingThunder! Why do you think [POLICYMAKERS] should #ThinkBabies? Share your answers below!
* **One Week Before:**We’re coming next week to [CITY/STATE CAPITAL] with #StrollingThunder. Help us let our [POLICYMAKERS] know it’s time to #ThinkBabies.
* **Friday Before:**[#] days to go until families from across [STATE/COMMUNITY] come to [CITY/CAPITAL] to tell our policymakers to #ThinkBabies. #StrollingThunder
* **One Day Before:**The babies are ready to take on [CITY/STATE CAPITAL]! #StrollingThunder #ThinkBabies

**Day-of *Strolling Thunder***

* The babies are here! We’ve brought #StrollingThunder to [CITY/STATE CAPITAL] to make sure our [POLICYMAKERS] #ThinkBabies.
* Check out the #StrollingThunder families taking over [STATE/CAPITAL] today to tell our policymakers to #ThinkBabies.
* *We recommend that you post thank-you messages and photos of policymakers meeting with families; photos/quotes from any rally remarks and photos if you hold a “stroll;” and retweet posts from families.*

**Posts Following *Strolling Thunder***

* **Thank You to Families:**We loved spending #StrollingThunder with you and your babies! Please feel free to share any photos or videos on this page. Stay in touch by joining the team that’s fighting for our future: <http://bit.ly/2M9eJpH>
* **Thank You to Partners:**Thank you to all of the organizations who joined us for #StrollingThunder and helped make sure our [POLICYMAKERS] #ThinkBabies. Join us: <http://bit.ly/2M9eJpH>
* **General Ongoing Campaign:**We’re not done yet! Investing in baby brain development is one of the most important things we can do to raise healthy adults. #ThinkBabies with us: <http://bit.ly/2M9eJpH>

**Social Media Guidance for Families Participating in Strolling Thunder**

The families you recruit will not only be advocates in person, but also through their social channels in advance of and during the *Strolling Thunder* event to spread the word digitally. Here are suggestions on the types of ways families can share their stories as they participate in *Strolling Thunder*. Be sure to remind them to follow your organization and use the hashtags #StrollingThunder and #ThinkBabies!

* **Traveling to Your State Capital and Arrival.** Snap some photos of the family packing and traveling by car, bus, and train to the *Strolling Thunder* event.
* *So happy to be joining @[ORGANIZATION] in [CITY/CAPITAL] for #StrollingThunder! @[RELEVANT POLICYMAKER(S)], get ready to #ThinkBabies with us [WHEN]!*

* **Decorating Their Child’s Stroller.**Parents should let their friends know that they are getting ready to stroll on your state capital or city council, and share photos of their handiwork.
* *Getting crafty in preparation for #StrollingThunder with @[ORGANIZATION]. Are our [POLICYMAKERS] ready for us to come [WHEN]? #ThinkBabies*

* **Meetings with Policymakers.**As parents make their way around the state capital, have them snap a photo at the entrance to each office, next to relevant flags and signs. When they meet with their policymakers, ask them to snap a family photo with their representative. Have them post these images throughout the day!
* *Big thanks to @[POLICYMAKER] for speaking with us during #StrollingThunder about how to give all babies a strong start in life. #ThinkBabies*

* **Participating in a Rally or Stroll.**Share photos from parents if you will hold either activity as part of your *Strolling Thunder* event.
* *Do you hear that? #StrollingThunder is here! So excited to be with @[ORGANIZATION] at [CITY/CAPITAL] Capitol Hill talking about what babies and toddlers need to thrive. #ThinkBabies*

**Social Media Guidance for Partners Participating in Strolling Thunder**

On [DATE], [ORGANIZATION], will host the first-ever *Strolling Thunder*TM advocacy day in [STATE/COMMUNITY] and [IN CITY/AT CAPITAL]. We’re bringing families from across [STATE/COMMUNITY] to meet with their policymakers they must [*Think Babies*](http://www.thinkbabies.org/)TM—for stronger families, vibrant communities, and a prosperous country. And we could use partners’ help by supporting *Strolling Thunder* on their digital channels!

**Follow Us**

Follow us on [PLATFORM @HANDLE] and at [PLATFORM @HANDLE] for LIVE updates throughout the day. We’ll share photos of *Strolling Thunder* families and important facts and resources. We invite you to retweet and share those posts! We’ll also keep an eye on your posts to amplify them throughout the day.

Check out [#ThinkBabies](https://twitter.com/search?f=tweets&vertical=default&q=%23ThinkBabies&src=typd) and [#StrollingThunder](https://twitter.com/search?f=tweets&vertical=default&q=%23StrollingThunder&src=typd) for more updates, including posts from the *Strolling Thunder* families and policymakers.

Questions? Please contact [NAME] at [EMAIL]. Thank you for your support!

**Promotional Materials**

To make it easy to share the *Think Babies* message and support *Strolling Thunder*, we’ve crafted some suggested social media posts. But we welcome you to create your own! Please be sure to include #ThinkBabies and #StrollingThunder.

***Event-Specific***

* We’re proud to support families from across [STATE/COMMUNITY] at #StrollingThunder! They’re in [CITY/CAPITAL] to tell our policymakers it’s time to #ThinkBabies.
* Families from across [STATE/COMMUNITY] are in [CITY/CAPITAL] for #StrollingThunder to tell our policymakers to #ThinkBabies. And we couldn’t agree more!
* We’re proud to be one of the many voices supporting #StrollingThunder today! [POLICYMAKERS], it’s time to #ThinkBabies.
* In support of babies & families across the [STATE/COMMUNITY], we urge our policymakers to #ThinkBabies now and always. #StrollingThunder

***Policy***[UPDATE BASED ON YOUR ORGANIZATION’S POLICY PRIORITIES]

* When babies get what their brains need to thrive, they have the best chance for healthy development. [HIGHLIGHT RELEVANT POLICYMAKERS]: it’s time to #ThinkBabies.
* When parents don’t have access to #paidleave, their babies—and our society as a whole—suffers. #ThinkBabies.
* Hey [HIGHLIGHT RELEVANT POLICYMAKERS]—when you think about a strong economy & workforce, military readiness & more, don’t forget to #ThinkBabies.
* Why #ThinkBabies? For time to bond after birth or adoption; quality, affordable #childcare; and resources parents want and need.
* In 28 states and DC, infant care costs more than college tuition. To change that, we all need to #ThinkBabies. [LEARN ABOUT THE COST OF CARE IN YOUR STATE [HERE](https://www.childcareaware.org/ccdc/?submissionGuid=e6913bcb-6765-425e-91be-9fa33fb3735d)]
* Most of our investments in early childhood start too late. That's why it's critical for [HIGHLIGHT RELEVANT POLICYMAKERS] to #ThinkBabies now!
* The littlest among us face big challenges, and the policies and programs in their state can make a difference in their ability to reach their full potential. How does [STATE] measure up? <http://bit.ly/2Epsfnl> #stateofbabies #thinkbabies

***Facts and Figures***

* Babies form 1 MILLION+ new neural connections every second! That’s a whole lot of brainpower. It’s time for [HIGHLIGHT RELEVANT POLICYMAKERS] to #ThinkBabies.
* The greatest opportunity to influence a child’s life happens between the ages of 0 and 3. Just one more reason [HIGHLIGHT RELEVANT POLICYMAKERS] need to #ThinkBabies.
* Investing in baby brain development is one of the most important things we can do to raise healthy, well-rounded adults. #ThinkBabies.
* When we #ThinkBabies, and help parents support their healthy development, we create a better future for all of us—higher graduation rates, more employment, and healthier lives.

***Virtual Event Social Media Posts***

* Today’s the day! We can’t wait to hear directly from parents on what #babies and families in [COMMUNITY] need to thrive. How are you taking time to #ThinkBabies today? Tune in: [LINK]
* How can we ensure babies in [COMMUNITY] get the best possible start in life? Today, we’re excited to have **[POLICYMAKERS]**join us to hear directly from families about the joys & challenges of raising infants & toddlers. Join us today! [LINK] #ThinkBabies
* *We recommend that you post thank-you messages and screenshots of policymakers who attended; photos/quotes from any stories, and retweet posts from families.*

*Think Babies* Policy Forum

Introduction

Hosting a *Think BabiesTM*Policy Forum is a powerful opportunity to educate policymakers, their staff, and other key stakeholders about the needs of babies and families in your community and how policy and programs can ensure they have what they need to thrive. Depending on your objectives, the Forum can feature parents, policy experts, research experts, early childhood professionals, policymakers, or a combination of different types of speakers. It can also be a small, informal community event or a larger state or regional event. You may also want to consider whether the Policy Forum can be held in conjunction with the release of a new report or data about babies and families in your community or state, or with existing events in your state or community, such as a children’s advocacy day or a coalition meeting.

In this section you will find:

* Sample agenda
* Sample event invitation
* Sample speaker invitation
* Tips for engaging families
* Media advisory template
* Op-Ed template
* Sample social media

**Sample Agenda**

* **Introductions**
  + *The moderator can note the importance of events that bring together policymakers, families, and experts, and the connection to the Think Babies campaign.*
* **Why Must We Think Babies?**
  + *A policy expert or researcher can speak about the critical role of early development, highlight relevant data, and address policy needs/opportunities.*
* **Panel Discussion**
  + *Parents or professionals working with young children speak in a moderated panel about the challenges they face and what supports they need.*
* **Policy Solutions**
  + *Policymakers can have the chance to respond and talk about potential policy solutions that address the challenges.*
* **Question and Answer**
  + *Invite questions and comments from the audience to spur a forum-wide discussion***.**
* **Closing**

**Sample Event Invitation**

**Join us for *a Think Babies*Policy Forum**

[ORGANIZATION] is hosting a *Think Babies* Policy Forum that will bring together policymakers, families with young children, early childhood professionals, and experts to highlight what babies—and families—in [STATE/LOCAL AREA] need to thrive. Giving all babies a strong start in life yields significant returns in the long run through more years of education, more employment, and better health as an adult. We need policymakers to *Think Babies*—for stronger families, vibrant communities, and a prosperous country and future.

[INSERT EVENT INFORMATION, INCLUDING DATE AND TIME, SPEAKERS, AGENDA, AND RSVP INFORMATION]

**About the *Think Babies* Campaign**

 ZERO TO THREE created *Think Babies* to bring attention to what babies and their families need to thrive. *Think Babies* is a call to action for policymakers to prioritize the needs of infants, toddlers, and their families and invest in our nation’s future.

Babies are our nation’s infrastructure. When we invest in babies and their families, we invest in our future workers, innovators, leaders, and our success as a nation. Yet opportunities to grow and flourish are not shared equally by all infants, toddlers, and families, reflecting past and present systemic racism and barriers to critical resources. Only when we ensure equal opportunity for **every** baby to reach their full potential will we be able build a strong foundation for our country.

For more event details, visit: [WEBSITE].

**Sample Speaker Invitation Email**

Subject: Join Us—Policy Forum to Highlight the Needs of Families with Babies and Toddlers

Dear [NAME],

As someone who is focused on issues affecting babies and toddlers [INSERT MORE SPECIFICITY IF NECESSARY], I am reaching out to invite you to participate in a Policy Forum to highlight what families with children ages 0 to 3 in [STATE/ COMMUNITY] need to thrive.

As you likely know, the first three years of babies’ lives have an enormous impact on how they learn and grow throughout their lifetime, with more than one million new neural connections forming every second. And you know what’s at stake: When babies have nurturing relationships, positive early learning experiences, and good health and nutrition, those neural connections are stimulated and strengthened, laying a strong foundation for the rest of their lives. But when babies don’t get what their growing brains need to thrive, they don’t develop as they should. This leads to life-long developmental, educational, social, and health challenges. [CONSIDER ADDING A SENTENCE ABOUT ECONOMIC IMPACT IF RELEVANT] ￼

Given [YOUR/YOUR ORGANIZATION’S FOCUS ON EARLY CHILDHOOD ISSUES], I am reaching out to invite you to speak at [ORGANIZATION’S] *Think BabiesTM* Policy Forum, part of ZERO TO THREE’s *Think Babies* effort, to bring attention to what babies and families need to thrive: [INSERT STATE/LOCAL POLICY ISSUES].

Every day, our policymakers make decisions that affect our work and the children and families we serve and our community’s future. and The Policy Forum is a powerful opportunity to educate them on what’s at stake.

I’d like to set up a time to talk more about your involvement in this important event.

Thank you,

[NAME]

**Tips for Engaging Families**

When engaging parents to speak at your *Think Babies* Policy Forum, we recommend that you consider the following:

* If possible, engage parents/caregivers who think of themselves as advocates and with whom your organization has a strong relationship. If you don’t have strong relationships with parents, consider partnering with an organization who does.
* Make sure that all speakers have the support and preparation to feel comfortable in their role. We strongly recommend doing at least one preparatory phone call or meeting.
* In recruiting parent speakers, keep in mind diversity of race/ethnicity, geography, income, family composition, and policy issue area.
* Consider ways that you can make their participation more accessible by offering supports such as transportation assistance and stipends for child care and/or lost wages.

**Media Advisory Template**

Media Advisory

*For immediate distribution*

Media contact: [NAME]

[PHONE NUMBER] [EMAIL ADDRESS]

[ORGANIZATION WEBSITE]

**Parents, Policymakers, and Professionals to Highlight What Babies and Families in [COMMUNITY] Need to Thrive**

*[ORGANIZATION] to convene Think Babies Policy Forum to Bring Attention to [POLICY PRIORITIES]*

**[CITY, STATE]** ([MONTH] [DATE], 20XX) — On [DATE], [ORGANIZATION] is bringing together policymakers, families with young children, early childhood professionals, and experts to highlight what babies—and families—in [STATE/LOCAL AREA] need to thrive. Giving all babies a strong start in life yields significant returns in the long run through more years of education, more employment, and better health as an adult. As part of  *Think BabiesTM*, created by ZERO TO THREE, the Forum will bring attention to the importance of the early years, when our brains grow faster than at any later point in our lives. Speakers and attendees will urge policymakers to prioritize the needs of infants, toddlers, and their families and invest in [COMMUNITY]’s future.

**WHAT:***Think Babies Policy Forum*

**WHO:**

* [SPEAKER 1]
* [SPEAKER 2]
* [SPEAKER 3]
* [SPEAKER 4]

**WHEN:**[TIME, TIME ZONE], [DATE]

**WHERE:**[LOCATION]

**RSVP:**[NAME] at [EMAIL]

**About [ORGANIZATION NAME]**

*[INSERT BOILERPLATE COPY HERE].*

**About *Think Babies***

 ZERO TO THREE created *Think Babies* to bring attention to what babies and their families need to thrive. *Think Babies* is a call to action for policymakers to prioritize the needs of infants, toddlers, and their families and invest in our nation’s future.

 Learn more at thinkbabies.org or follow @ZEROTOTHREE on Twitter.

**Sample Social Media**

**Posts to announce your event**

* Join us on [DATE] as we bring together policymakers, parents, and experts to highlight what [LOCAL AREA] babies and families need to thrive! Register here: [LINK]
* We know that parents and caregivers are the true experts on what #babies and families in [COMMUNITY] need to thrive. Join us on [DATE] to share your story and encourage our leaders to #ThinkBabies: [LINK]

**Posts to preview your event**

* **Two Weeks Before:**We’re just two weeks out from our Think Babies Policy Forum! Will you be there to share your story and urge policymakers to #ThinkBabies? Register now: [LINK]
* **One Week Before:**What do [COMMUNITY]’s #babies and families need to thrive? Join us next week to #ThinkBabies and share how we can make sure all infants and toddlers have a strong start in life. [LINK]
* **One Day Before:**What do you want [COMMUNITY]’s leaders to know about raising #babies? TMRW, take some time to #ThinkBabies with us: [LINK]

**Day-of event posts**

* Today’s the day! We can’t wait to hear directly from parents on what #babies and families in [COMMUNITY] need to thrive. How are you taking time to #ThinkBabies today?
* How can we ensure babies [COMMUNITY] get the best possible start in life? Today, we’re excited to have [POLICYMAKERS] join us to hear how they can make a difference for babies and families. #ThinkBabies
* *We recommend that you post thank-you messages and photos of policymakers who attended; photos/quotes from any stories, and retweet posts from attendees.*

**Posts following event**

* **Thank You to Attendees:**Thank you to everyone who joined us to #ThinkBabies! Please share any photos or videos on this page. Stay in touch by joining the team that’s fighting for our future: <http://bit.ly/2M9eJpH>
* **General Ongoing Campaign:**We’re not done yet! Investing in baby brain development is one of the most important things we can do to ensure a strong future for [COMMUNITY]. #ThinkBabies with us: <http://bit.ly/2M9eJpH>
* **General Ongoing Campaign:**Babies form 1 MILLION+ new neural connections every second! That’s a whole lot of brainpower. It’s time for [HIGHLIGHT RELEVANT POLICYMAKERS] to #ThinkBabies. Join the team that’s fighting for our future: <http://bit.ly/2M9eJpH>
* **General Ongoing Campaign:**The greatest opportunity to influence a child’s life happens between the ages of 0 and 3. Just one more reason [HIGHLIGHT RELEVANT POLICYMAKERS] need to #ThinkBabies. Join us: <http://bit.ly/2M9eJpH>
* **General Ongoing Campaign:**Investing in baby brain development is one of the most important things we can do to raise healthy, well-rounded adults. #ThinkBabies with us: <http://bit.ly/2M9eJpH>
* **General Ongoing Campaign:**When we #ThinkBabies, and help parents support their healthy development, we create a better future for all of us—higher graduation rates, more employment, and healthier lives. Join the team that’s fighting for our future: <http://bit.ly/2M9eJpH>

**Template Op-Ed for *Think Babies* Policy Forum**

**[STATE/COMMUNITY] policymakers must make babies and toddlers a priority**

*By [NAME] and [NAME]*

[INSERT BRIEF STORY/ANECDOTE FROM A FAMILY THAT DEMONSTRATES THE CHALLENGES].

The science is clear—our brains grow faster between the ages of 0 and 3 than at any later point in our lives, forming more than one million new neural connections every second. When babies have nurturing relationships, positive early learning experiences, and good health and nutrition, those neural connections are stimulated and strengthened, laying a strong foundation for the rest of their lives. But when babies don’t get what their growing brains need to thrive, they don’t develop as they should. This leads to life-long developmental, educational, social, and health challenges

That’s why [ORGANIZATION] is joining  *Think BabiesTM*  to host *a Think Babies*Policy Forum in [STATE/LOCAL AREA] to highlight the challenges faced by babies and their families in [STATE/COMMUNITY] and the policies that support infants, toddlers, and families to thrive. Policymakers must make babies’ care and development a priority in [YEAR] and beyond. It’s all part of the *Think Babies*campaign to call on all policymakers to invest in infants, toddlers, and their families.

In [STATE/COMMUNITY], we have seen firsthand the [DETAIL CHALLENGES AFFECTING FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN AGES 0 TO 3, AND HOW THIS AFFECTS THEIR HEALTH AND FUTURE POTENTIAL]. We know that the state where a baby is born makes a big difference in their chance for a strong start in life.

Overall, [STATE] ranks in the [1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th] tier looking at areas essential to give our babies the best beginning, but all states have room to grow. [FIND YOUR STATE RANKING AS WELL AS INDIVIDUAL DATA POINTS [HERE](https://stateofbabies.org/states/)]

[FAMILY NAME], and all of our families in [STATE/COMMUNITY], need [DETAIL SUPPORTS AS THEY RELATE TO POLICY PRIORITIES].

That’s why we need our policymakers to *Think Babies*—by [INSERT CALL TO ACTION]. Doing so will [INSERT POSITIVE FUTURE OUTCOME FOR CHILDREN AND STATE/COMMUNITY AS A WHOLE].

Learn more at [WEBSITE].

*[NAME] is the [TITLE] of [ORGANIZATION]. [NAME] is the [TITLE] of [ORGANIZATION].*

*Think Babies* Site Visit

*Invite Policymakers to Visit High Quality Programs Supporting Children Ages 0-3*

Introduction

Demonstrate the needs that babies, toddlers, and their families have by showing your policymakers how they can do more to support families and babies in the critical early years. Site visits to high quality child care, Early Head Start, home visiting, and other child development programs, or businesses that offer paid leave for their employees who are new parents, will enable your local leaders to experience for themselves how policies and programs can and must support families and the value of investments in high quality early childhood programs. It’s an opportunity for you to talk about the challenges families face and directly urge policymakers to *Think BabiesTM*. Note: In response to the public health threat of the COVID-19 pandemic, some partners have held site visits outdoors.

In this section you will find:

* Tips for hosting a successful site visit
* Sample policymaker invitation
* Sample agenda
* Media advisory template
* Sample social media

**Tips for Hosting a Successful Site Visit**

* **Find out when in your policymaker will be available.**
* To find out the times federal lawmakers are on recess, visit www.house.gov or www.senate.gov and click on the calendar feature.
* To find out the session calendar for your state legislators, visit the National Conference of State Legislatures website at http://www.ncsl.org/research/about-state-legislatures.aspx
* To find out the schedules of your local policymakers, visit your city or town’s website.

* **Schedule the visit.** Following your written invitation, call your policymaker’s office at least 4-6 weeks in advance and ask to set up a time for the visit. Offer several scheduling options.

* **Invite policymaker staff.** If you cannot arrange a time to have your policymaker visit your site, consider hosting their staff. They serve as advisors to policymakers and it is equally important that they understand your work with infants and toddlers in the communities they represent.

* **Confirm in advance of the visit.** Call your policymaker’s office one week before the scheduled visit to confirm. Ask who will be attending along with the policymaker so you know how many to expect. Email them a copy of the schedule for the visit and directions to the site. Be sure to let them know if media will be in attendance.

* **Prepare your staff and families.** It is important to ensure that your staff and parents are comfortable with a policymaker visiting and observing the program. Give advance notice to anyone who will be involved in the site visit, so they have time to plan accordingly, and allow time for them to ask questions before the visit. Let them know that the purpose of the policymaker’s visit is to learn more about your work, not to judge or watch, and that it could result in increased support for your program or project. Remind them that they do not need to prepare for the visit – they can dress and act as they would any other day.

* **Invite program supporters.** Consider inviting your supporters such as your Board of Directors, local funders and parents to participate in the day’s activities. Having them present will send an effective message to the policymaker that your work impacts, and is supported by, the larger community.

* **Include family stories.** Consider creating an opportunity for parents to directly share the impact that your program has had on their family. If you do this, make sure that families feel prepared and supported. You can do this by helping them to practice their story, providing them with information about relevant policy issues, letting them know what to expect during the visit, and reassuring them that they are the experts on their story.

* **Consider inviting the media.** A visit from a policymaker is a great way to garner media attention for your priorities. See the sample press release included in this section. If media will be attending, ensure that children and parents know that they might be part of a news story and photographed.

* **Take photos.** Photos of the visit can be shared on social media and are great way to keep the momentum from your visit going. You will need to obtain a written photo release from each person who is photographed. For children under the age of 18, the release must be signed by the parent or guardian.

* **Give the policymaker something to take home.** Provide them a brochure or fact sheet about your program to refer to after the visit. Consider providing them your *State of Babies Yearbook*state profile: <https://stateofbabies.org/states/>.

* **Follow up.** Continue the momentum built during the site visit and follow-up with a thank you note to the policymaker immediately after the visit. Recap your main messages in the note, mention specific ways that the policymaker could support infants and toddlers in your community, and share the photographs from the visit. Offer to be a resource to them in the future.

**Sample Site Visit Invitation**

Dear [POLICYMAKER NAME/TITLE]:

I am writing to invite you to visit [PROGRAM] in your district on [OFFER MULTIPLE DATES IF POSSIBLE] to learn about the work happening in our community to ensure that children get the best possible start in life. [PROVIDE INFORMATION ABOUT THE TYPE OF SERVICE THE PROGRAM PROVIDES, INCLUDING DETAILED INFORMATION ABOUT THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES SERVED. IF YOU ARE A CONSTITUENT, SAY SO EXPLICITLY. IF YOUR ORGANIZATION IS DIFFERENT FROM THE PROGRAM YOU ARE INVITING THEM TO VISIT, STATE YOUR ORGANIZATION AS WELL].

As you likely know, the first three years of babies’ lives have an enormous impact on how they learn and grow throughout their lifetime, with more than one million new neural connections forming every second. This is why [YOUR ORGANIZATION] is joining  [*Think BabiesTM*](https://www.thinkbabies.org/)  to bring attention to what babies and their families need to thrive. [INCLUDE A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF YOUR WORK.]

We understand that you maintain a busy schedule, but we would be honored if you would consider visiting [PROGRAM] to learn more about the services being offered to your youngest constituents. We would be happy to work with you to arrange a visit on [DATES].  We look forward to seeing you soon.

Sincerely,

[YOUR NAME]

**Sample Site Visit Agenda**

* **Welcome and introductions**

*This is a chance to introduce key staff or partners, orient the policymaker to what they will see during their visit, and to provide information about your program and infants and toddlers in your community, including the challenges that families face and the policy solutions that help babies and their families thrive.*

* **Site tour**

*When showing the policymaker around, point out elements of the environment that contribute to the quality experience of children and families.*

* **Site visit activity**

*Try to schedule the visit on a day or time during an activity that really showcases your work with infants, toddlers and families. This could be an early learning activity with the children or observing a group meeting with parents - or both if time permits. Consider if there are opportunities for a visitor to participate in the activity.*

* **Wrap up**

*This is a time to reiterate your priorities, to answer any questions the policymaker may have, and to thank them for making time to visit and for their support of children and families in their district.*

**Media Advisory Template**

Media Advisory

*For immediate distribution*

Media contact: [NAME]

[PHONE NUMBER] [EMAIL ADDRESS]

[ORGANIZATION WEBSITE]

**[POLICYMAKER] to Visit [SITE AND PURPOSE]**

*[ORGANIZATION] to host [POLICYMAKER] to learn what more can be done to support [HIS/HER] youngest constituents*

**[CITY, STATE]** ([MONTH] [DATE], 20XX) — On [DATE], [POLICYMAKER] will join [ORGANIZATION] to visit [SITE AND PURPOSE]. [DETAILS ON WHAT THE ORGANIZATION DOES, WHO THE POLICYMAKER WILL MEET AND WHAT THEY WILL SEE]. The visit will enable [POLICYMAKER] to see the direct impact of policies and programs that support babies and families. [HE/SHE] will have the opportunity to learn more about the impact the critical first few years have on a child’s future success and the challenges families face. [PROGRAMS/POLICIES HIGHLIGHTED DURING VISIT] are critical for supporting young children’s development during the earliest years when our brains develop faster than at any later point in our lives.  This visit is being hosted by [YOUR ORGANIZATION] as we join with the national *Think BabiesTM*effort, created by ZERO TO THREE, which brings attention to what infants, toddlers and families need to thrive.

**WHAT:***[SITE VISIT DESCRIPTION]*

**WHO:**

* [SPEAKER 1]
* [SPEAKER 2]
* [SPEAKER 3]
* [SPEAKER 4]

**WHEN:**[TIME, TIME ZONE], [DATE]

**WHERE:**[LOCATION]

**RSVP:**[NAME] at [EMAIL]

###

**About [ORGANIZATION NAME]**

*[INSERT BOILERPLATE COPY HERE].*

**About *Think Babies***

ZERO TO THREE created *Think Babies* to bring attention to what babies and their families need to thrive. *Think Babies* is a call to action for policymakers to prioritize the needs of infants, toddlers, and their families and invest in our nation’s future. Learn more at thinkbabies.org or follow @ZEROTOTHREE on Twitter.

**Sample Social Media**

**Posts to announce/preview your event**

* Babies’ brains are developing faster now than at any later point in their lives. That’s why we’re thrilled to welcome [POLICYMAKER HANDLE] on [DATE] to [DESCRIPTION] to see how [SITE] is supporting the littlest in our community. #ThinkBabies
* We’re grateful that [POLICYMAKER HANDLE] is taking time to #ThinkBabies with us on [DATE] as we visit [SITE AND DESCRIPTION].
* **One Day Before:**TMRW,[POLICYMAKER HANDLE] is joining us to #ThinkBabies as we visit [SITE AND DESCRIPTION].

**Day-of event posts**

* [POLICYMAKER HANDLE], get excited – today’s the day! We can’t wait to see directly what #babies and families in [COMMUNITY] need to thrive. How are you taking time to #ThinkBabies today?
* How can we ensure babies [COMMUNITY] get the best possible start in life? Today, we’re excited to show [POLICYMAKER HANDLE] the impact that [SITE] has on [COMMUNITY]’s #babies and families. #ThinkBabies.
* *We recommend that you post thank-you messages and photos of the policymaker who attended; photos/quotes from any stories, and retweet posts from attendees.*

**Posts following event**

* **Thank You to Attendees:**Thank you to everyone who joined us to #ThinkBabies! Please feel free to share any photos or videos on this page. Stay in touch by joining the team that’s fighting for our future: <http://bit.ly/2M9eJpH>
* **General Ongoing Campaign:**We’re not done yet! Investing in baby brain development is one of the most important things we can do to ensure a strong future for [COMMUNITY]. #ThinkBabies with us: <http://bit.ly/2M9eJpH>
* **General Ongoing Campaign:**Babies form 1 MILLION+ new neural connections every second! That’s a whole lot of brainpower. It’s time for [HIGHLIGHT RELEVANT POLICYMAKERS] to #ThinkBabies. Join the team that’s fighting for our future: <http://bit.ly/2M9eJpH>
* **General Ongoing Campaign:**The greatest opportunity to influence a child’s life happens between the ages of 0 and 3. Just one more reason [HIGHLIGHT RELEVANT POLICYMAKERS] need to #ThinkBabies. Join us: <http://bit.ly/2M9eJpH>
* **General Ongoing Campaign:**Investing in baby brain development is one of the most important things we can do to raise healthy, well-rounded adults. #ThinkBabies with us: <http://bit.ly/2M9eJpH>
* **General Ongoing Campaign:**When we #ThinkBabies, and help parents support their healthy development, we create a better future for all of us—higher graduation rates, more employment, and healthier lives. Join the team that’s fighting for our future: <http://bit.ly/2M9eJpH>

*Think Babies* Family Listening Session

Host a Listening Session with Parents of Children 0-3 and Elected Officials

**Introduction**

A listening session with parents of children ages 0-3 can be a great way to help policymakers understand what infants, toddlers and families in their community need to thrive. The size and formality of a listening session can vary depending upon your objectives. The key element is that you are creating an opportunity for policymakers to hear directly from families about the challenges that they experience as parents of young children and the programs and services that support them.

In this section you will find:

* Tips for holding a successful listening session
* Sample invitation for families
* Sample policymaker invitation
* Sample agenda
* Media advisory template
* Sample social media

**Tips for Holding a Successful Family Listening Session**

Note: In response to the public health threat of the COVID-19 pandemic, some partners have held parent listening sessions virtually. For tips on how to hold a virtual event, please visit ZERO TO THREE’s [*Think Babies*Virtual Event Guide](https://www.thinkbabies.org/think-babies-events/think-babies-virtual-events/). 

* Make the event family friendly by holding the session at a time and location convenient for families, providing child care or making the event itself child friendly, and providing a meal. You could also consider working with a local partner organization to provide books or another giveaway for families.
* Be clear with families about how the information they provide will be used- make clear if policymakers will be in attendance.
* If you will take pictures of parents and/or children, you will need to have families sign a waiver.
* Supportive facilitation is important for helping families to feel comfortable. Beginning with a meal so that families have an opportunity to mingle first can also help.
* Be clear in your invitation to families that you are looking for parents who currently have children ages 0-3. A broadly worded invitation to a listening session on issues related to ages 0-3 often results in a large number of service providers attending, which can yield great information, but is a different event.
* If you anticipate a large group and multiple policymakers, consider breaking into smaller groups for discussion so that all families have the opportunity to participate.
* Follow up with policymakers both before and after the event. Follow up on your written invitation before the event to confirm their attendance. Follow up after the event to thank them for attending and offer yourself as a resource in the future.
* Give the policymaker something to take home. Provide them a brochure or fact sheet about your organization to refer to after the visit. Consider providing them your *State of Babies Yearbook: 2019* state profile: <https://stateofbabies.org/states/> and the *Think Babies* Leave Behind for Elected Officials: <https://www.thinkbabies.org/take-action/toolkit/leave-behind-for-elected-officials/>
* Follow up with families. Listening sessions are a great way to build relationships with families who can be engaged in future advocacy opportunities.
* If you have the capacity to provide interpretation, consider doing so and including that information in your outreach to families.

**Sample Listening Session Invitation for Families**

ATTENTION [LOCAL AREA] parents and guardians of children ages 0-3: We want to hear from you! You are invited to join us for a *Think BabiesTM*listening session [with local policymakers] to share your stories about the joys and challenges of raising infants and toddlers in [COMMUNITY]. Every parent wants to give their child a strong start in life. But the experience of the pandemic has laid bare what families already knew: Our systems for supporting the health and well-being of young children and families are threadbare.

**Please come share your stories**your**policymakers as we urge them to *Think Babies*.**

When we *Think Babies* and invest in infants, toddlers, and their families, we ensure a strong future for us all. 

[INSERT DETAILS ABOUT YOUR EVENT INCLUDING HOW TO REGISTER]

**About [YOUR ORGANIZATION]**

**About the *Think Babies* Campaign**

ZERO TO THREE created *Think Babies* to bring attention to what babies and their families need to thrive. *Think Babies* is a call to action for policymakers to prioritize the needs of infants, toddlers, and their families and invest in our nation’s future.

Babies are our nation’s infrastructure. When we invest in babies and their families, we invest in our future workers, innovators, leaders, and our success as a nation. Yet opportunities to grow and flourish are not shared equally by all infants, toddlers, and families, reflecting past and present systemic racism and barriers to critical resources. Only when we ensure equal opportunity for **every** baby to reach their full potential will we be able build a strong foundation for our country.

**Sample Policymaker Invitation**

Dear [TITLE, NAME],

[ORGANIZATION] is hosting a *Think BabiesTM* listening session with parents of children ages 0-3 in your district to highlight what babies—and families—in [STATE/LOCAL AREA] need to thrive. Giving all babies a strong start in life yields significant returns in the long run through more years of education, more employment, and better health as an adult. We need policymakers to *Think Babies*—for stronger families, vibrant communities, and a prosperous country and future.

We would love to invite you to join us to hear directly from parents in your district/state/city about the challenges that they face as parents of young children and what can the programs and services that support them. [INSERT DETAILS ABOUT YOUR EVENT, INCLUDING THAT THEY WILL HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE REMARKS]

**About [YOUR ORGANIZATION]**

**About the *Think Babies* Campaign**

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For more event details, visit: [WEBSITE].

Sincerely,

[YOUR CONTACT INFO]

**Sample Agenda**

* **Opening remarks/overview**
* **Introductions**
  + For families, tell us about your family, particularly your baby or toddler.
* **Discussion with families:**
  + What has your experience been accessing quality affordable child care? What has been helpful or challenging?
  + What services have you relied on to support your child’s healthy emotional development?
  + Can you talk about your experience with paid leave to bond with your baby? If you didn’t have access to paid leave, what was that like for your family?
  + What services and supports have you relied on to support your child’s healthy physical health and nutrition?
  + Thinking about your own experience, what types of support do you feel all parents/guardians need to be successful?
* **Opportunity for policymakers in the room to make remarks and respond to what they heard**
* **Reflections and closing**

**Media Advisory Template**

Media Advisory

*For immediate distribution*

Media contact: [NAME]

[PHONE NUMBER] [EMAIL ADDRESS]

[ORGANIZATION WEBSITE]

**Parents and Caregivers from Across [STATE/LOCAL COMMUNITY] to Joys and Challenges of Raising Young Children as They to Urge Policymakers to *Think Babies***

*[ORGANIZATION] leads families in advocating for [POLICY PRIORITIES]*

**[CITY, STATE]** ([MONTH] [DATE], 20XX) — [ORGANIZATION] is bringing together parents and guardians of children ages 0 to 3 for a *Think BabiesTM* listening session to share their stories of the joys and challenges that come with raising infants and toddlers in [STATE/COMMUNITY]. The first three years of babies’ lives have an enormous impact on how they will learn and grow throughout their lifetime. As the real experts on their children, these families will shine a light on what infants, toddlers, and families in [COMMUNITY] need to thrive. On [DATE], they will urge their policymakers to make babies’ care and development a priority in 20XX and beyond.

**WHAT:***Think Babies Parent Listening Session*

**WHO:**

* [SPEAKER 1]
* [SPEAKER 2]
* [SPEAKER 3]
* [SPEAKER 4]

**WHEN:**[TIME, TIME ZONE], [DATE]

**WHERE:**[LOCATION]

**RSVP:**[NAME] at [EMAIL]

**About [ORGANIZATION NAME]**

*[INSERT BOILERPLATE COPY HERE].*

**About *Think Babies***

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**Sample Social Media**

**Posts to announce your event**

* ATTN [LOCAL AREA] parents and guardians of children ages 0-3! We want to hear from you! Join us for a #ThinkBabies listening session to share your stories about the joys and challenges of raising infants and toddlers. Register here: [LINK]
* We know that parents and caregivers are the true experts on what #babies and families in [COMMUNITY] need to thrive. Join us on [DATE] to share your story and encourage our leaders to #ThinkBabies:

**Posts to preview your event**

* **Two Weeks Before:**We’re just two weeks out from our #ThinkBabies parent listening session! Will you be there to share your story and urge policymakers to #ThinkBabies? Register now: [LINK]
* **One Week Before:**What do [COMMUNITY]’s #babies and families need to thrive? Join us next week to #ThinkBabies and share how we can make sure all infants and toddlers have a strong start in life. [LINK]
* **One Day Before:**What do you want [COMMUNITY]’s leaders to know about raising #babies? TMRW, we get to hear from YOU! Take some time to #ThinkBabies with us: [LINK]

**Day-of event posts**

* Today’s the day! We can’t wait to hear directly from parents on what #babies and families in [COMMUNITY] need to thrive. How are you taking time to #ThinkBabies today?
* How can we ensure babies in [COMMUNITY] get the best possible start in life? Today, we’re excited to have [POLICYMAKERS] join us to hear directly from families about the joys and challenges of raising infants and toddlers. #ThinkBabies
* *We recommend that you post thank-you messages and photos of policymakers who attended; photos/quotes from any stories, and retweet posts from families.*

**Posts following event**

* **Thank You to Families:**We loved hearing directly from families at our #ThinkBabies listening session! Please share any photos or videos on this page. Stay in touch by joining the team that’s fighting for our future: <http://bit.ly/2M9eJpH>
* **General Ongoing Campaign:**We have heard parent stories but we’re not done yet! Investing in baby brain development is one of the most important things we can do to ensure a strong future for [COMMUNITY]. #ThinkBabies with us: <http://bit.ly/2M9eJpH>
* **General Ongoing Campaign:**Babies form 1 MILLION+ new neural connections every second! That’s a whole lot of brainpower. It’s time for [HIGHLIGHT RELEVANT POLICYMAKERS] to #ThinkBabies. Join the team that’s fighting for our future: <http://bit.ly/2M9eJpH>
* **General Ongoing Campaign:**The greatest opportunity to influence a child’s life happens between the ages of 0 and 3. Just one more reason [HIGHLIGHT RELEVANT POLICYMAKERS] need to #ThinkBabies. Join us: <http://bit.ly/2M9eJpH>
* **General Ongoing Campaign:**Investing in #baby #braindevelopment is one of the most important things we can do to raise healthy, well-rounded adults. #ThinkBabies with us: <http://bit.ly/2M9eJpH>
* **General Ongoing Campaign:**When we #ThinkBabies, and help parents support their healthy development, we create a better future for all of us—higher graduation rates, more employment, and healthier lives. Join the team that’s fighting for our future: <http://bit.ly/2M9eJpH>

*Think Babies* Advocacy Training

Introduction

Policymaking can be a mysterious process and it can be intimidating to take the first step into advocacy. Hosting an infant-toddler advocacy training for parents, service providers, and other interested stakeholders can be a great way to build new advocates and engage additional voices in your *Think BabiesTM* advocacy. This can be a short training in the evening, a full day intensive session, or anywhere in between, depending upon your capacity and objectives. The primary goals of a *Think Babies* advocacy training are to: increase participants’ understanding of infant-toddler policy issues and the policy process; help them recognize the power of their stories and expertise to make a difference; and give them concrete strategies and opportunities to engage in advocacy on the issues that are important to them.

In this section you will find:

* Tips for holding a successful *Think Babies* advocacy training
* Sample *Think Babies* advocacy training agenda
* Sample *Think Babies* advocacy training invitation
* Sample *Think Babies* advocacy training slide deck

**Tips for Holding a Successful *Think Babies* Advocacy Training**

* Make the event family friendly by holding the session at a time and location convenient for families, providing child care or making the event itself child friendly, and providing a meal or snacks.
* Make the training as interactive as possible. Having time for participants to practice their story makes them much more likely to feel ready to engage in advocacy.
* Clearly recognize the expertise of families and service providers and the importance of their voices in advocacy. People may not know how vital their voices are to the policy process.
* If your training will include both parents and service providers, think through how you will ensure that content is relevant and engaging for both audiences.
* If you have existing relationships with strong parent advocates, consider having them participate as presenters to model sharing their story and speak about what advocacy means to them.
* Be sure to add participants to your email lists so that they receive information from you about future advocacy opportunities following the training.

**Sample *Think Babies* Advocacy Training Invitation**

Your voice matters to babies! Join [ORGANIZATION] for an advocacy training to learn about issues facing infants, toddlers, and their families in [STATE/COMMUNITY] and how you can raise your voice to let our policymakers know that it’s time to *Think BabiesTM*. This opportunity is open to parents, caregivers, service providers, and anyone else who is committed to ensuring that babies and their families get the best possible start in life.

At this training, you will [MODIFY BASED ON YOUR TRAINING SPECIFICS]:

* Learn about current opportunities and challenges facing babies and their families in your community
* Learn about why your voice is so important to urge policymakers to *Think Babies* and get tools and resources to support your advocacy
* Make a plan for your advocacy
* Connect with others in your community who care about these issues as much as you do
* Learn specific ways that you can make a difference for babies

[INSERT EVENT LOGISTICTICS, INCLUDING HOW TO RSVP]

**About [YOUR ORGANIZATION]**

**About the *Think Babies* Campaign**

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**Sample *Think Babies* Advocacy Training Agenda**

* **Welcome and Overview**
* **Introductions**

*(Consider a prompt to help connect participants to the reasons they want policymakers to Think Babies, such as “what does it mean to you to be an advocate on behalf of infants, toddlers and families?”)*

* ***Think Babies* Advocacy Presentation**
  + - Overview of *Think Babies* and why we must make the potential of every baby our national priority
    - Infant-toddler policy priorities
    - Learning about the policymaking process
    - Your voice matters!
    - Advocacy actions you can take to move the needle for babies:
      1. Meet with policymakers
      2. Call or write to policymakers
      3. Letters to the editor (LTEs) and Op-eds
      4. Spreading the word via social media
      5. Site visits with policymakers
      6. Attend policymaker townhall events
* **Time to Practice**

*(This could include having participants work on developing their own stories, role playing, shooting a short video for social media, etc.)*

* **Commitments**

*(*Encourage training participants to take the next step in their advocacy by taking the [Think Babies Pledge](https://www.thinkbabies.org/pledge/). The Pledge signs them up to receive Think Babies updates about future opportunities for advocacy and gives three easy options for for them to take action now including:

* + [Offer to be a resource](http://salsa3.salsalabs.com/o/50400/p/dia/action4/common/public/?action_KEY=22188) to your Members of Congress on issues that impact their youngest constituents and their families.
  + [Tell Congress](https://www.thinkbabies.org/take-action/tell-congress/) about what babies and families need to thrive.
  + [Ask your network to join you](https://www.thinkbabies.org/pledge/) by sharing the *Think Babies* pledge using the Facebook and Twitter buttons in the upper left.

Ending the training with an action opportunity is a great way to engage participants in a tangible plan for future advocacy. )

* **Reflections and Closing**

Presentation

We have created a sample Powerpoint presentation slide deck which can be modified for your Think Babies advocacy training. The full slide deck can be downloaded [here.](https://zerotothree.sharepoint.com/:p:/s/PolicyCenter/Ea6CPJdH0C1FinO43x0NAroBYhrL4kYJi3N_POGHgsJjmw?e=Cqksdj)

Telling Your Story Worksheet

Stories help people understand experiences different from their own. *Your story* can play a powerful role in helping policymakers understand what families across the country are facing, bringing to life what babies and their families need to thrive:

* Quality, affordable child care;
* Time for parents to bond with their babies;
* Healthy emotional development; and
* Strong physical health and nutrition.

This worksheet guides you through elements of your story so that you are ready to communicate why it’s so important to *Think Babies*.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Your Name** | **Your Baby’s Name and Age**  **(If you’re a parent)** | **Your Organization**  **(If you’re a professional serving babies and families)** |
|  |  |  |
| **In a few sentences, introduce your family. If you’re a professional, explain the role you play and the families that you serve.** | | |
|  | | |
| **When you think about your experience either directly as a parent or as a service provider supporting families with young children, what is one of the biggest challenges that you see?** | | |
|  | | |
| **How has this challenge affected your family or the families you serve? Why is it a problem for the larger community? How does it impact your financial security or the broader econcomy?** | | |
|  | | |
| **What programs and services have helped to support your family or the families that you serve?** | | |
|  | | |
| **What do you want your policymakers to do?** | | |
|  | | |

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