

What is *Strolling Thunder*?

Strolling Thunder is a national movement, engaging parents and caregivers, with the goal of ensuring state and federal policymakers hear directly from constituents about what babies and families need to thrive. It centers family stories and voices, grounded in the idea that babies federal policy and investment have an important role to play in ensuring every baby and toddler gets a strong start. Over the past decade, at the federal level. *Strolling Thunder* has brought families together for visible moments and direct engagement with Members of Congress and the administration, focusing on policies that support good health, strong families and positive early learning experiences. This has taken the form of an annual national event in Washington, DC, where ZERO TO THREE has brought families from every state to meet with their Members of Congress and attend a public-facing component, such as a rally. [Issues](#) the event has focused on in the past include quality, affordable child care, paid family leave, economic security, health care, and mental health supports. *Strolling Thunder* has included both in-person participation in Washington, DC and virtual engagement.

At the state level, partners across the country have hosted their own *Strolling Thunder* events to highlight infant-toddler policy priorities and connect families with their state legislators. These have taken many forms, including Capitol rallies paired with stroller processions, advocacy trainings followed by legislator luncheons and letter deliveries, and constituent meetings with their legislators. Some states transformed Capitol spaces into family-friendly play areas where lawmakers came to the families, while others paired creative deliveries like board books and hand-decorated kites to every legislator's office. When in-person events weren't possible, partners pivoted to virtual and hybrid formats with mailed art kits, advocacy postcards and livestreamed programs that maintained visibility and engagement. Whether large or small, in-person or virtual, these state events have shown that the *Strolling Thunder* model is adaptable and effective at building family voice in the policy process.

This year ZERO TO THREE is piloting a new model. In addition to our DC-based event, we will be partnering with a state to host – a federally focused *Strolling Thunder* event within a Member of Congress's own community. Rather than bringing families to Washington, this approach brings the power of *Strolling Thunder* to lawmakers' home districts and states, creating visible, family-centered moments that strengthen relationships with federal policymakers and lift up policy solutions that support babies and their families.

Examples of Public Facing *Strolling Thunder* Events

Below are examples of the types of public facing activations organizations have hosted in the past, and the types of events that can work well for a federally focused event in a congressional

district or community setting. These examples are intended to spark brainstorming, not limit what you propose.

- **Rally or press conference with stroller procession:** A short program with strong visuals, paired with a stroller procession and a defined moment for engagement with federal policymakers and media.
- **Festival style playdate with resource fair:** A family centered community gathering with kid activities and partner tabling, designed to be easy for families to attend and easy to amplify.
- **Awareness walk or stroll:** A walk or stroller friendly route with a start or finish program that raises awareness of early childhood policies and has clear engagement with their federal policy maker.
- **Baby focused town hall:** A structured conversation with a federal representative centered on parent stories, paired with a clear engagement plan and next steps, with optional basic livestream support.

What we have seen work well

Strolling Thunder events tend to share a few practical choices that make them easy to execute and more likely to drive meaningful policy engagement and follow up.

- Align to the policy calendar or, if timing is outside a time when policy decisions are being made, plan for visibility paired with concrete follow up steps. For in-district events, consider aligning with congressional recess so that members of Congress are available in their home districts. See the [2026 House Calendar](#) and [2026 Senate Schedule](#) for exact dates.
- Determine policymakers and policy focus areas as far in advance of the event as possible, so that those drive event format, content, and follow-up.
- Build the event for families with babies and toddlers, including child centered elements and practical supports such as diapering and lactation setup.
- Reduce barriers to participation with practical and financial supports for families, such as transportation help, meals, and stipends or gift cards.
- Confirm policymaker engagement in advance.
- Use a trauma-informed approach to your family recruitment, preparation and engagement strategies (see this [paper](#) from ZERO TO THREE for examples)
- Prepare parents to share concise stories tied to a clear policy focus, so engagement results in policy relevant asks and confident messengers.

- Plan language access when needed, including interpretation and language specific spaces. Ensure overall event accessibility by proactively asking families about accommodation needs (e.g., wheelchair access, sensory-friendly spaces, ASL interpretation) and confirming those accommodations are in place ahead of the event.
- Plan documentation and communications cadence so that day of content supports continued engagement beyond the event.
- Use hybrid elements when they strengthen readiness and reach, such as virtual trainings or story coaching before the public moment.
- Follow-up with families that participate after the event to let them know the impact of their efforts.

Additional Resources:

- [Engaging Families in Policy Change](#)
- [Applying Trauma-Informed Principles to Work with Family Advocates](#)
- [Guidance & Best Practices: Parent Leader Compensation Scale](#)
- [Engaging Community Members: A Guide to Equitable Compensation](#)
- [Think Babies](#)