

It's Time For Congress To Invest In Babies

STROLLING THUNDER 10 YEARS

Hi, I'm baby

Zuri

This is my story.

Location:

Tuscaloosa, Alabama

My Grown Up's Name:

Elizabeth Moss

“ You can't get services without a diagnosis. The Alabama waitlists were over a year long. So I drove four hours to Georgia.



Quality child care and early learning opportunities support the healthy development necessary for parents to reliably go to work or school, and for babies to do well in school and, ultimately, in life. Federal policies are foundational to ensuring child care and early learning access, including through programs like the Child Care and Development Fund and Head Start, including Early Head Start.

Our story begins...

When my daughter Zuri was 2 and still not talking, I knew something was wrong. Her pediatrician agreed. But in Alabama, the waitlists for autism evaluations were over a year long. You can't get services, like speech therapy, without a diagnosis. We couldn't wait. We drove four hours to Georgia to get her evaluated.

We returned to Alabama with a diagnosis and got Zuri into early intervention. Then I noticed the twitching episodes. I brought it up at every neurology appointment. I was told it was nothing. But I kept pushing. After months of waiting, Zuri finally had an electroencephalogram, an EEG, to measure electrical activity in her brain. The next morning, we got the diagnosis: focal epilepsy, a seizure disorder. The doctor said, "You were right. Here's her medication."

Zuri is 3 now. She goes to a school program twice a week. She's interacting with other kids and making progress in her speech. When I come home, she runs to me like she's been waiting all day. That's everything.

But the services she needs are still out of reach. There are only seven autism service providers in Tuscaloosa. All are full. And the kind of therapy Zuri needs—called Applied Behavior Analysis, or ABA—is difficult to access. ABA is a common approach for supporting children with autism that focuses on building skills and reducing challenging behaviors through structured, one-on-one support. So, we're considering moving just to get her the care she needs.

IT'S TIME To Make Policy Change

All families want their babies to have a safe, nurturing place to learn and grow, but finding child care we can afford feels impossible. Without it, I'm forced to make difficult decisions about work, school, and how to provide for my family. I'm asking Congress to invest in affordable, high-quality child care and early learning programs so parents like me can fulfill their responsibilities and our babies can get a strong start.

We Want Congress to Support Good Health by:

- Opposing cuts to Medicaid to ensure babies and those who care for them can access the care they need for a strong, healthy start.
- Increasing funding for early intervention through Medicaid and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part C to ensure young children stay on track.
- Increasing investment in early childhood health and mental health, including through SAMHSA's Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Grant Program and Project LAUNCH, HRSA's Early Childhood Development Expert program and HRSA's Transforming Pediatrics for Early Childhood.

About Think Babies™ and Strolling Thunder™

ZERO TO THREE created Think Babies™ as a call to action for policymakers to prioritize good health, strong families, and positive early learning experiences, particularly during the crucial early years of brain development. Strolling Thunder™ is an annual event for families to share their stories with their elected officials in person. [Learn more at www.ThinkBabies.org/StrollingThunder](http://www.ThinkBabies.org/StrollingThunder).