

It's Time For Congress To Invest In Babies

STROLLING THUNDER 10 YEARS

Hi, I'm baby

Eliana

This is my story.

Location:

Douglas, Arizona

My Grown Up's Name:

Laura Franco

“ Every child deserves access to early learning. Not just those below a certain income line, and not just those who live near cities with more options.



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...

I live in Douglas, Arizona, a small rural border town. We have very few early learning options here, and the ones we have are expensive. Formal early learning programs are limited, and access is even more limited.

Families like mine—who earn just a little too much to qualify for assistance but not enough to afford private care—fall through the gap. At one point, an agency asked whether we qualified for AHCCCS, Arizona's income-based health coverage program. When I said no, the conversation ended. No alternatives. No guidance. Just: you don't qualify.

I left my job to stay home with my children during these early years when so much of a child's development is happening. But this means I don't qualify for employment-based programs, and I don't have the income to pay for care out of pocket. So, I made it work. I ran an informal homeschool program for Ezra and organized park meetups with other moms in similar situations.

My son Ezra, who is now 4, was on the Head Start waitlist for years. Three months ago, he finally started the program. And the difference has been immediate. He is more confident. His language has grown. He is more engaged with other children and the world around him.

My daughter Eliana, who is 1, is now receiving home visits.

These programs changed everything. What if the funding had been cut before we got in? We waited years. Families like mine shouldn't have to wait that long.

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 Positive Early Learning Experiences by:

- Increasing funding for child care access via the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) and Head Start, including Early Head Start, while preserving quality standards and workforce investments and rejecting policies that would reduce access.
- Opposing cuts to the Social Services Block Grant (SSBG), Child Care Entitlement to States (CCES), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and other programs that keep child care providers open.
- Investing in early intervention through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Part C, ensuring services are available in the home and integrated into early learning and care settings.

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).