

It's Time For Congress To Invest In Babies

STROLLING THUNDER 10 YEARS

Hi, I'm baby

Felicia Joy

This is my story.

Location:

Anaheim, California

My Grown Up's Name:

Hector Palominos

“ I've been in therapy most of my life and it's made me a better father. But too many dads don't have access to that.”



Federal policies play a critical role in the health and well-being of both babies and their caregivers, including through Medicaid, early intervention, mental health, and pediatric investments. By investing in the health and well-being of children and their families now, we can set them up for lifelong success, and the future success of our country.

Our story begins...

I was 17 when I became a father. My parents found out and put me to work at their party supply business every weekend—no excuses. At the time, I didn't understand it. Now I do. They were keeping me accountable and making sure I finished school. Because of them, my son Michael has a father who shows up.

My wife, Cecilia, and I have three more children—Hector, 8; Serenity, 5; and Felicia Joy, 8 months. I work evenings at Kaiser as an environmental services manager, so I mostly see them in the morning. I wake up early every day to have that time with them.

When my oldest son was a toddler, his mom and I separated, and I worried about him. My son was very anxious and quiet. Because I was deeply affected by a separation from my mom when I was young, I know it is best to get help early! His mother and I agreed to get him therapy when he was little, but his mom wasn't fully on board, and we had to give it up. He didn't get meaningful help until he was 12 or 13, when I asked the judge to make it a part of our custody agreement. The therapy helped, but I still worry about him.

I've been in therapy most of my life. It makes me a more present, patient, and self-aware father. But I know too many dads who never had access to that kind of support. Parenting resources often center on mothers, and fathers are left out.

Fathers need mental health care, flexible schedules, and parenting programs, too.

IT'S TIME To Make Policy Change

Families like mine are doing everything we can to keep our babies healthy, but it's not always easy to find affordable care or get the support we need. When appointments are delayed or services aren't available, for me or my baby, it affects children for the rest of their lives. That's why I'm asking Congress to invest in programs that make sure caregivers and babies like mine can access reliable care from the very beginning.

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).