

# It's Time For Congress To Invest In Babies

**STROLLING THUNDER** 10 YEARS

Hi, I'm baby

**Winona**

This is my story.

**Location:**

**Kuna, Idaho**

**My Grown Up's Name:**

**Melissa**

“ I left my law firm so I could have paid maternity leave and health insurance. My career decisions are shaped entirely by access to health care and child care.



**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...

Getting pregnant in Idaho came with obstacles. With doctor shortages, the earliest I could see an OB-GYN was 20 weeks. At five weeks, I got the last spot at the midwife clinic for my birth month. We paid \$2,500 upfront, which included insurance.

At 36 weeks, I developed complications. My midwife team could no longer see me, and there were no doctors who would take me as a new patient that late. My midwives found a nurse-midwife affiliated with the hospital. I didn't meet her until I was in labor. I spent 30 hours at that hospital, mostly alone with nurses, before Winona was born at 38 weeks. That was our introduction to parenthood.

When Winona was 12 weeks old, she started child care. She had COVID within three days. I had just returned from maternity leave with no paid time off left. My self-employed husband, Justin, couldn't take time off. Then I caught COVID. I was sick, on and off, for 16 weeks straight.

It shouldn't be this way. But it's getting worse. A labor and delivery ward, one town over, closed during my pregnancy. Now every option is 30 minutes away. For families in northern Idaho, it is hours.

I am an attorney. I left private practice to get paid maternity leave and health insurance. My career decisions revolve around access to health care and child care—because without them, nothing else works. Mothers shouldn't have to make that calculation. Now, we do.

## 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).