

It's Time For Congress To Invest In Babies

STROLLING THUNDER 10 YEARS

Hi, I'm baby

D'Amyrah

This is my story.

Location:

Slidell, Louisiana

My Grown Up's Name:

India Wharton

“ Without Medicaid, we would not have had nursing, we wouldn't have been able to handle his supplies. We wouldn't have been able to handle any of it.



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...

My son, Darris Jr., was my easiest birth. I was not prepared for him to become my most complex child. He stopped eating around 6 months old. He wasn't even babbling. For about three months, he would sit and just stare. No coos, no smiles, no emotion. I knew something was wrong. I have five children, ages 2 to 16. I have worked in child care since high school. I have run an in-home daycare. Darris' pediatrician kept telling me it was normal.

It took four months of pushing to get him a referral to feeding therapy. My husband, Darris, and I didn't find out we didn't need a referral until a speech therapist told us. By then, our son was 1½. We lost precious time we can never get back.

My son is 4 years old now. He is nonverbal. To tell me what he needs, he uses an AAC device—short for augmentative and alternative communication, a tablet that helps him communicate. A year of ABA therapy, or applied behavior analysis, which helps children build communication and daily living skills, has made a significant difference. He's vocalizing more. He's finding his way.

My daughter, D'Amyrah, just turned 2. She's also on the spectrum. Because of everything I learned fighting for my son, getting her connected to services was so much easier. I knew who to call. I knew what to do. I knew not to wait. No parent should have to learn the hard way. That knowledge should just be part of the system.

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).