

It's Time For Congress To Invest In Babies

STROLLING THUNDER 10 YEARS

Hi, I'm baby

Teegan

This is my story.

Location:

Batesville, Mississippi

My Grown Up's Name:

Kiffany Rice

“ Getting to the hospital took everything we had.”



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 daughter Teegan is 5 months old. She was diagnosed with hydrocephalus on January 29 and cerebral palsy on March 10. She had brain surgery on February 9 to have a shunt placed to drain fluid and relieve pressure.

Getting to that hospital took everything we had.

Before her diagnosis, I had taken her to our local ER. Twice I was told it was acid reflux. Twice I was told it was gas. I knew something wasn't right. I kept pushing. When I finally insisted on a scan, and three pediatric nurses backed me up, we got results in 10 minutes: fluid on the brain. She needed to be airlifted to a hospital for a shunt. Her head circumference was 26. It is now 19. The goal is 16 to 17.

I am a mental health therapist. I understand health systems. Even still, I found this hard.

The nearest therapy providers are 40 minutes away. They are short-staffed, so Teegan's occupational, physical, and speech therapies are scheduled on four separate days, 30 minutes each.

I work in human services and earn \$20 an hour in my community. Forty-five minutes away, I could make \$60 to \$100 an hour. That is why providers leave. That is why rural communities like mine cannot keep them.

Teegan is not defined by her diagnosis. I tell her we're going to "glam up that walker." She has a big life ahead of her. But she needs consistent services closer to home to help her get there.

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).