

It's Time For Congress To Invest In Babies

STROLLING THUNDER 10 YEARS

Hi, I'm baby

Eastyn

This is my story.

Location:

Pablo, Montana

My Grown Up's Name:

Jamie

“ The only program in Montana that could diagnose autism had just lost its funding. We were told to consider going out of state.



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 noticed something was different about my son, Eastyn, when he was 3 months old. He wouldn't make eye contact. He didn't want skin-to-skin. He never cried. He never babbled. As a first-time mom, I kept asking myself: Is it me?

We live on a reservation in rural Montana, which the state calls "frontier." When we were trying to get a diagnosis, the only program in the state that could evaluate children for autism had just lost its funding and shut down. We were told to consider traveling to Washington, Arizona, or Colorado. We were told the waitlist for diagnosis was years long. I went home and searched until I found a retired specialist an hour away. I called her and told her our story. She took us.

At 2, Eastyn was diagnosed with Level 3 autism and classified as nonverbal.

Early intervention changed everything. Eastyn started preschool at 2 through the tribal Head Start and the local school district's special education program. Montana had recently passed legislation to fund early childhood special education, which made that possible.

A few months later, just before he turned 3, he said "Mama" for the first time. I had waited for that word for so long. He says it all the time now.

Families in rural and Native communities shouldn't have to fight this hard for care. Early intervention is not a luxury. For Eastyn, it was the difference between silence and "Mama."

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.