

It's Time For Congress To Invest In Babies

STROLLING THUNDER 10 YEARS

Hi, I'm Baby

Smith

This is my story.

Location:

West Fargo, North Dakota

My Grown Up's Name:

Hannah Gilbery-Liebl

“ There wasn't a day during those three months that I wasn't stressed about whether we could afford our bills..”



When babies and families have the resources they need, like food, steady income, and safe housing, it keeps children on track and makes our country stronger. Federal policies play a critical role in the well-being of both babies and their caregivers, including through paid family and medical leave, financial supports, community services, immigration enforcement activities that prioritize babies' well-being, and effective child welfare prevention and intervention programs.

Our story begins...

My son Smith was hard-won. My husband, Tyler, and I went through IVF — entirely out of pocket — to build our family. When I was five months pregnant, I showed up to work one Monday morning and learned that 70% of my company had been laid off. I had to let my entire team go, then pack up my own office. Just like that, the stability we had spent years building was gone.

I found a new job through my network, but my maternity leave was completely unpaid. I had worked full-time since I was 22. I fought hard for this baby. I told myself I was taking my 12 weeks no matter what — but every single day of those three months, I was running through worst-case scenarios in my head. What if the water heater breaks? Can we afford groceries? Can we cover our bills?

I was physically there with Smith. But mentally, I was somewhere else entirely.

The financial stress didn't just fall on me. Tyler was the sole earner during that time, carrying the weight of our family on his shoulders while also trying to be present as a new dad. It affected his mental health, too. Unpaid leave doesn't stay in one lane — it ripples through the whole family.

Smith just turned 1. He is the greatest joy of our lives. But the beginning was harder than it needed to be, and it didn't have to be that way.

IT'S TIME To Make Policy Change

Every day, families like mine are making hard choices about how to stretch a paycheck, between housing, food, and everything babies need. For some families like mine, added challenges like child welfare system involvement or the fear of being separated from loved ones make it even harder to stay stable. I'm asking Congress to invest in policies that help families like mine stay financially secure, safe, and stable.

We Want Congress to Support Strong Families by:

- Supporting paid family leave, the Child Tax Credit and other financial supports that make raising a baby more affordable.
- Fully funding HRSA's Infant-Toddler Court Program to help ensure young children at risk of child welfare involvement can find safe, permanent homes.
- Protecting and investing in SNAP, TANF and SSBG, housing assistance like Housing Choice vouchers, and other programs that meet the basic needs of babies and families.
- Ceasing immigration enforcement operations in areas with young children present and avoiding family separations or detentions

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).