

It's Time For Congress To Invest In Babies

STROLLING THUNDER 10 YEARS

Hi, I'm baby

Emilia

This is my story.

Location:

East Brunswick, New Jersey

My Grown Up's Name:

Katelyn Fletcher

“ Her medication costs \$700 a month without insurance. We pay \$70. I understand how lucky we are. Luck is not a health system.



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 have a PhD in infant development. I have researched why early bonding matters. Babies have stronger cognitive and social skills and better health when their mothers have paid leave. That knowledge is sitting in peer-reviewed journals. This is no secret.

Like many mothers, I returned to work when my daughter Emilia was 4 months old — not the 6 months recommended by UNICEF, the World Health Organization, and the American Academy of Pediatrics. Those first months were critical. After her birth, I was hospitalized for postpartum preeclampsia and needed months of physical therapy.

Emilia was born with a hemangioma, a benign infantile tumor, near her eye. We discovered it at her two-month checkup. She was admitted to a pediatric ER to stop the tumor from growing and affecting her vision. She had an MRI, cardiology tests, and visits with an ophthalmologist and oculoplastic surgeon. We coordinated among four medical teams because the healthcare system doesn't do that for families.

Her medication costs \$700 a month without insurance. We pay \$70. We are lucky to live near a pediatric ER. Most hospitals don't have one. We are lucky to have health insurance. But luck is a completely inadequate foundation for a healthcare system.

Emilia soon starts child care — at \$20,000 a year. Millions of families are navigating the same impossible tradeoffs between health, caregiving, and financial stability every day. I know what the research says, I know who has the power to act on it, and I want them to use it.

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).