

It's Time For Congress To Invest In Babies

STROLLING THUNDER 10 YEARS

Hi, I'm baby

Penelope

This is my story.

Location:

Tulsa, Oklahoma

My Grown Up's Name:

Ashley Aleman

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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...

In 2020, I returned home through Tulsa Remote, a program that encourages people to relocate to lower-cost areas. This allowed me to be closer to family and purchase a house. Since then, I've married my husband, Gabriel, and we have a 2-year-old daughter, Penelope. Our experience accessing child care and health care has been inconsistent and, at times, unreliable.

When I became pregnant, I began touring child care centers almost immediately. I studied early childhood education and understood how important high-quality care would be for my daughter's development. The center I chose is 30 minutes from our home, and I pay nearly 40% of my monthly income for it.

Because of the cost, I briefly tried another provider. There, I saw teachers disengaged, on their phones, and speaking harshly to toddlers. Fortunately, we were able to return to our previous center.

Penelope was born with hip dysplasia. After Tulsa's pediatric orthopedic surgeon relocated, we had to drive to Oklahoma City for care. The specialist there said her condition was critical and recommended a specialized brace that cost us \$500 out of pocket, with insurance. Something didn't feel right, so we drove 4½ hours to Dallas for a second opinion. Doctors there confirmed Penelope's development was normal, and no intervention was necessary. I had options because I was informed, knew the right questions to ask, and had the resources to seek another opinion. Babies should not require a parent with specialized education—or the ability to cross state lines—to receive appropriate care.

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).