

It's Time For Congress To Invest In Babies

STROLLING THUNDER 10 YEARS

Hi, we're babies

Willa and Frederik

This is our story.

Location:

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Our Grown Up's Name:

Clara

“ A child care scholarship saved our family nearly \$20,000. Because of it, we could have Willa. Because of it, we finished our PhDs.



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...

As a maternal and child health researcher, I spend my days producing evidence that policymakers can use to improve the lives of families with young children. Stable, bonded caregiving matters in these early months. But when my son Freddy was born, I got only six weeks of paid parental leave.

My husband, Kyle, and I staggered our parental leave. We used every vacation day and sick hour and stretched that time to about six months. So, when Freddy was not even 4 months old, I went back to work. Pumping breast milk at my desk, I research how to keep mothers and babies healthy while my own baby and I are apart at a time when he is wholly dependent on me.

When we were PhD students in North Carolina, a child care scholarship covered nearly all of Willa's care at a five-star center. It saved us close to \$20,000. With that, we could have Willa when we did. We could finish our degrees. Investment in early childhood makes families possible.

Now we live in Philadelphia. Pennsylvania has no paid parental leave policy. When both kids are in child care, we will pay about \$35,000 a year, which is more than our rent. We can cover it, but we are delaying buying a home and not contributing to retirement.

Meanwhile, Freddy lights up around 3-year-old Willa. And that is what these policies are about—time, stability, and the foundation children need in their earliest months. Families aren't getting enough of it.

IT'S TIME To Make Policy Change

Every day, families are making hard choices about how to stretch a paycheck, between housing, food, and everything babies need. For some families, 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 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).