

# It's Time For Congress To Invest In Babies

**STROLLING THUNDER** 10 YEARS

Hi, I'm baby

**Navy**

This is my story.

**Location:**

**Hill City, South Dakota**

**My Grown Up's Name:**

**Katie Espinoza**

“ We applied for financial assistance. The answer came nine months later. By then we'd paid the bill. But it wasn't easy.



**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 husband Miguel lost his job two weeks before my due date. His employer unexpectedly closed. We live in a small tourist town in South Dakota, where winter jobs are scarce. Our daughter, Navy, was born in December 2024.

I applied for financial assistance through the hospital. We were denied. They said I earned too much. Even with insurance, we paid over \$6,000 out of pocket toward the hospital charges, an obstetrician, and physical therapy—for a birth with no complications. Half of my maternity leave was unpaid.

In late July 2025, I began having postpartum health complications. I saw a midwife before I could get an appointment with my obstetrician in December, but because she wasn't familiar with my history, I didn't feel fully evaluated. Her diagnosis addressed only part of what was going on. After five months of symptoms, the care I received felt more like temporary fixes than real treatment. We work. We pay our bills. And we still live paycheck to paycheck.

We fall into the gap—earning too much to qualify for help, but not enough to feel stable. We did everything “right,” working hard and saving before having kids to avoid this situation. But when Miguel's income was cut in half, and we started burning through our savings, there were no resources for us to turn to.

That gap is where a lot of families like ours are living right now. We always imagined having four children. I no longer think that's possible.

## 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.
- 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).