

# It's Time For Congress To Invest In Babies

**STROLLING THUNDER** 10 YEARS

Hi, we're babies

## Ember and Onyx

This is our story.

Location:

Lubbock, Texas

Our Grown Up's Name:

Heather

“ We paid close to \$20,000 last year in premiums, copays, and birth costs. We make too much to qualify for help and not enough for that not to hurt.



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...

I worked until I was 41 weeks and one day pregnant. Not because I wanted to. Because I don't have paid maternity leave, I had to save every hour of paid time off I could. When my PTO and employment insurance ran out, we had no income. That is not a gap in the system. That is the system. To stay insured during my leave, I had to go to work biweekly — newborn in my arms — to pay my premium in person (cash or check). No phone, no mail, no online option. (I only had to go in to pay once my PTO and EI ran out.)

I am a physician assistant. I work seven 12-hour shifts, then seven days off. My husband Oscarr is home with our kids — Odynn, 4; Ember, 2; and Onyx, 4.5 months. We have chosen to be a single-income family because we deeply believe these early years matter. We have planned, budgeted, sacrificed, and figured it out. But that has come at a cost: we earn too much to qualify for most help, but not enough to keep up with the cost of health care, child care, and raising three kids.

Last year, we paid nearly \$20,000 in insurance premiums, copays, and out-of-pocket birth costs. If one of our kids goes to the ER, that's \$750 out of pocket. If I raise a concern at a well-child visit, I get charged a separate sick-visit copay.

The early years are too important, and too short, to spend most of them just trying to keep up.

## 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).