

# It's Time For Congress To Invest In Babies

**STROLLING THUNDER** 10 YEARS

Hi, I'm baby

**Chloe**

This is my story.

**Location:**

**West Jordan, Utah**

**My Grown Up's Name:**

**Meg Ashto**

“ Without the Children's Center, these girls would not be in my care right now. We would not be a family.



**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 licensed foster mom, I got "the call" for Ruby (now 6) when she was 7 days old, and for Chloe (now 3) when she was 5 days old. I brought them home from the hospital, years apart, committed to giving them love and stability. What I didn't understand was how long and complex the effects of prenatal opioid exposure would be, or how little support exists once an adoption is finalized.

Both girls were born addicted to opioids, and when I asked what that meant for their development, I was told there was little to no research. Chloe would scream for hours if she wasn't being held. Not typical crying, but what nurses call "the opioid cry." I was told to let her cry it out. But that is not a cry-it-out situation. This is a nervous system in crisis.

During this time, I was also leaving an abusive marriage. Eventually, I lost my job because I repeatedly had to leave to pick up a child who couldn't be calmed. There are no workplace protections for that.

The Children's Center, a birth-to-5 therapeutic center, is the reason my family is together. Ruby is thriving, and Chloe is in therapeutic preschool. While we're still in the thick of it, there are moments I can step back and see the foundation I've built, and in those moments, I know we're going to be OK. But we got here without the roadmap families like mine should have all along.

## 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.

**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).