

It's Time For Congress To Invest In Babies

STROLLING THUNDER 10 YEARS

Hi, I'm baby

Jiavonna

This is my story.

Location:

Fredericksburg, Virginia

My Grown Up's Name:

Jessica

“ We make too much to qualify for help and not enough to actually get ahead. We're just stuck.”



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 and I both have master's degrees. I'm a special education teacher; Tyree is an instructional designer. We both work full-time. And we are stuck.

Child care for our daughter Gia costs \$1,200 a month — almost half of my salary. We pay \$2,200 a month in rent. We have paid off our cars. We have done everything right. And we still cannot save enough to buy a house, still don't qualify for child care assistance, and are asking ourselves whether we can afford to give Gia a sibling.

We live an hour and a half outside of DC, in part because the more diverse, higher-resourced area we'd want to raise her in is simply too expensive. Our families are in North Carolina and New Jersey. When Gia is sick — and she had ear infections nearly every two weeks when she first started child care, leading to surgery for ear tubes — one of us must take off work. We're paying for her child care spot whether she's there or not. To protect our jobs, we alternate days off to care for her when she's sick. There is no cushion.

We are not asking for everything. We are asking for something — some acknowledgment that families who are doing as much as they can are still being held in place by a system that has no room for them.

A child should never feel like a financial burden. But the cost of child care is making it impossible not to do that math.

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).