

It's Time For Congress To Invest In Babies

STROLLING THUNDER | 10 YEARS

Hi, I'm baby

Hazel

This is my story.

Location:

Essex Junction, Vermont

My Grown Up's Name:

Adrienne

“ We have almost nothing left at the end of each month because of child care, student loans, a mortgage, and the rising cost of everything.



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 had Hazel's child care spot secured before my first ultrasound. That's not an exaggeration. That is the child care market in Chittenden County. You get your name on a list as soon as possible, or you risk having no options at all. We were lucky to get in. And then we spent more than \$30,000 on child care last year.

By most measures, my husband Jeff and I are doing well. He works in community development and housing policy for the state. I'm a youth development consultant. We own our home and cover our basic needs. But we have almost nothing left at the end of each month because of child care, student loans, a mortgage, and the rising cost of everything. Vermont has an expanded child care subsidy. We don't qualify. We are stuck where so many families are—making too much for help, but not enough to feel secure.

A sister location of our child care center recently shut down amid abuse allegations. Families at our center are asking whether to stay. Many of us stay because there is nowhere else to go. You cannot leave and expect to find a spot. That is not safety; that is a hostage situation disguised as a child care market.

In my work, I partner with a state that uses the My Child Standard, which asks whether a decision is good enough for your own child. I want that question asked of every early childhood policy. The answer should shape everything else.

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).