

It's Time For Congress To Invest In Babies

STROLLING THUNDER | 10 YEARS

Hi, I'm baby

Caleb

This is my story.

Location:

Auburn, Washington

My Grown Up's Name:

Michelle

“ I had to complete the same parenting course twice just to access services for my son. By the time we got through, we had already hit rock bottom.



Federal policies play a critical role in the health and well-being of both babies and their caregivers, including through Medicaid, early intervention, mental health, and pediatric investments. By investing in the health and well-being of children and their families now, we can set them up for lifelong success, and the future success of our country.

Our story begins...

I was born in the Netherlands. I came to Washington state, met my husband, Steve, and never left. We have three boys — Elijah, 8; Avery, 5; and Caleb, 3. Two are neurodivergent. One has mental health needs. Another has a severe speech disorder called apraxia. Getting them the support they needed has been the defining challenge of our family's life.

I started to notice that Elijah would respond unusually when he was little. His primary care physician referred us to a parenting program, but I knew parenting wasn't the problem. We got an assessment at 3 years old, but it was inconclusive. It took another 3 years to get him a formal ADHD diagnosis.

Elijah attended a private preschool, but he still wasn't receiving the right services, and things spiraled out of control. He started kindergarten outside his school district. He was 6, and within six months of starting a new school, his enrollment waiver was revoked due to his behavior. He has no history of hurting other children or teachers, but the system wasn't built to support a child with his developmental needs. If I had known then what I know now, I would have pushed back harder.

Services that help my children, including Early Intervention and Early Head Start, are under threat. We no longer qualify for other important services, although we still live paycheck to paycheck. Being a one-income household. As a social worker, I watch the news with real fear for my family and my community.

IT'S TIME To Make Policy Change

Families like mine are doing everything we can to keep our babies healthy, but it's not always easy to find affordable care or get the support we need. When appointments are delayed or services aren't available, for me or my baby, it affects children for the rest of their lives. That's why I'm asking Congress to invest in programs that make sure caregivers and babies like mine can access reliable care from the very beginning.

We Want Congress to Support Good Health by:

- Opposing cuts to Medicaid to ensure babies and those who care for them can access the care they need for a strong, healthy start.
- Increasing funding for early intervention through Medicaid and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part C to ensure young children stay on track.
- Increasing investment in early childhood health and mental health, including through SAMHSA's Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Grant Program and Project LAUNCH, HRSA's Early Childhood Development Expert program and HRSA's Transforming Pediatrics for Early Childhood.

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).