

# It's Time For Congress To Invest In Babies

**STROLLING THUNDER** 10 YEARS

Hi, I'm baby

**Wyndi**

This is my story.

**Location:**

**Sheridan, Wyoming**

**My Grown Up's Name:**

**Emily Ellis**

“ We were at the hospital less than 24 hours, no meals, nothing extra — and our bill was over \$16,000 before insurance.



**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...

My husband Sumner and I work from home in Sheridan, Wyoming. That is the only thing keeping our family financially together. Without remote work, we would not be in Wyoming. And without Wyoming, we would not have the cost of living that makes any of this manageable.

Our daughter Wyndi was born two years ago. We had planned a home birth and paid over \$5,500 upfront to a midwife. When labor didn't progress as expected, we transferred to a hospital. We were there for less than 24 hours. No extra meals. No extras of any kind. Our bill was over \$16,000.

We made regular payments. But the hospital split the accounts—one for me, one for Wyndi—without telling us. I was paying into one account without realizing the funds weren't being applied to both. We were sent to collections. I am a medical billing specialist. I still got blindsided.

We are not looking for a handout. We are looking for a health care system that is honest, transparent, and built for families who are doing everything they can and still coming up short. We would love to have a second child. We have decided not to try yet because we cannot take on another unexpected \$16,000 bill.

We grew up in families where money was tight in different ways. We have worked hard to build something more stable. And still, a single birth sent us to collections. That is not a personal failure. That is a system failing families.

## 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).