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North Carolina Family to Call on Congress to Prioritize Babies and Families

Hundreds of Parents, Babies and Advocates from Across the Country will Join Strolling Thunder™ 2019 on Capitol Hill

Raleigh—On April 30, hundreds of parents, babies and advocates from across the country will rally on Capitol Hill and call on Congress to make the potential of every baby a national priority through policies such as comprehensive national paid leave and quality, affordable child care. Jessica Carter, mother of 1-year old Ashlyn from Deep Gap, North Carolina, will be joining the event. The family will meet with Senators Richard Burr and Thom Tillis and Representative Virginia Foxx to share their experience balancing the demands of parenthood without paid leave, staggering child care costs, and the benefits of programs that support babies' healthy emotional and physical development.

The Carter family was selected to travel to Washington to share their story and ask their Congressional delegation to *Think Babies and Act™* as part of the third annual *Strolling Thunder*, organized by nonpartisan early childhood development nonprofit [ZERO TO THREE](#).

"I'm heading to Washington to speak with Senators Burr and Tillis, and Congresswoman Foxx, about the need for affordable child care," said Jessica Carter. "As a director of an early childhood education program, I can speak firsthand to the struggle associated with providing high-quality care and education programs for young children while balancing what parents in our community can reasonably afford to pay for child care. It's time for Congress to Think Babies and invest in our country's child care system."

According to ZERO TO THREE's recent [State of Babies Yearbook: 2019](#), where a baby is born makes a big difference in their chance for a strong start in life. Overall, North Carolina ranks in the top half of all states in areas essential to give our babies the best beginning, but the *Yearbook* provides a look at the many areas the state must improve to give infants and toddlers the opportunity to fulfill their potential.

The science is clear. Our brains grow faster in the first few years than any later point in life, forming more than one million new neural connections every second. When babies have nurturing relationships, early learning experiences, and good nutrition, those neural connections

are stimulated and strengthened, laying a strong foundation for the rest of their lives. When babies don't get what their growing brains need to thrive, they don't develop as they should. This leads to lifelong developmental, educational, social, and health challenges.

"Families are struggling every day, in every state, and we are urging our leaders to act," said Myra Jones-Taylor, chief policy officer of ZERO TO THREE. "Most of our investments in early childhood start too late, at age 4 or later. By that time the most important years of brain development have passed. Today's babies become tomorrow's workers, parents and leaders. Now is the time for policymakers on both sides of the aisle to make every baby a priority through policies built on the science of brain development and budgets that put babies and families in North Carolina, and across the nation, first."

"Ensuring that babies have healthy beginnings, supported families and access to high-quality early care and learning experiences during the first months and years of life has an enormous impact on how a child learns and grows throughout his or her lifetime," said Michele Rivest, policy director at the NC Early Education Coalition. "To do better for our children and our state's future, we need our leaders to focus on our youngest and most valuable resource by investing in things that work. For 2019, our *Think Babies NC* policy agenda is focusing on access to quality child care, health care, home visiting, workplace pregnancy accommodations and paid family leave."

To ensure a brighter future for all babies, ZERO TO THREE is working with Congress to prioritize the needs of infants, toddlers and their families and invest in our future. The organization's policy agenda includes establishing a comprehensive national paid leave program that provides adequate time off to care for newborns or newly adopted children, and allows families to take leave if their children or another family member is experiencing a serious illness. The agenda also includes expanding access to quality, affordable child care by increasing investments in our country's child care system now, while working toward a comprehensive, long-term solution for working families, as well as expanding investments in programs that support babies' healthy development, such as Early Head Start, and in infant and early childhood mental health.

To learn more about North Carolina, visit stateofbabies.org.

To learn more about *Strolling Thunder*, visit thinkbabies.org/strollingthunder.

To learn more about North Carolina's *Think Babies*™ NC Initiative, visit ncearlyeducationcoalition.org/think-babies.html

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About ZERO TO THREE

ZERO TO THREE works to ensure all babies and toddlers benefit from the family and community connections critical to their well-being and development. Since 1977, the

organization has advanced the proven power of nurturing relationships by transforming the science of early childhood into helpful resources, practical tools and responsive policies for millions of parents, professionals and policymakers. For more information, and to learn how to become a ZERO TO THREE member, please visit zerotothree.org, facebook.com/zerotothree or follow [@zerotothree](https://twitter.com/zerotothree) on Twitter.

About Think Babies

ZERO TO THREE created the *Think Babies* campaign to make the potential of every baby a national priority. When we *Think Babies* and invest in infants, toddlers, and their families, we ensure a strong future for us all. Learn more at thinkbabies.org or follow [@zerotothree](https://twitter.com/zerotothree) on Twitter.

About the North Carolina Early Education Coalition

The North Carolina Early Education Coalition works to ensure that all children have access to high-quality early care and learning experiences. Since 1990, the organization has highlighted the proven power of quality early childhood education by sharing information and resources with parents, professionals and policymakers. The Coalition is a proud partner in the national ZERO TO THREE Think Babies™ campaign and in the Pritzker Children's Initiative's National Collaborative for Infants and Toddlers. For more information, please visit www.nearlyeducationcoalition.org, facebook.com/nearlyedcoalition or follow [@NCEarlyEdCo](https://twitter.com/NCEarlyEdCo) on Twitter.