

Babies took over Capitol Hill to rally for paid family leave and affordable childcare ^[1]

Author: Timisit, Annabelle

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EXCERPTS

On Tuesday (May 8), Capitol Hill was crawling with babies.

Babies from all 50 states and the District of Columbia, along with their families, had descended upon the Hill's east lawn for the annual "Strolling Thunder" Rally, organized by **Zero to Three** ^[3], an early childhood development non-profit. The rally is part of Zero to Three's "Think Babies" initiative, which urges Congress members to consider the needs of young children and their families in their policy-making.

Several politicians were in attendance, including House minority leader Nancy Pelosi, House representative Rosa DeLauro and representative Chuck Fleischmann (who, together, co-chair the Congressional Baby Caucus), and representative Bobby Scott. Among the rally attendees, three issues stood out as primary concerns: The need for paid family leave, and for quality, affordable health care and childcare.

Hannah Simmons, a mother of two from Farmington, Minnesota, told Quartz that she'd come to the rally because her personal experience had convinced her of the need to fight for children's and parents' rights. Simmons lost her job just six weeks before delivering her second child, which meant that she and her husband lost their insurance. When her baby was born with an undiagnosed critical congenital heart defect that required open-heart surgery, she and her husband were put under immense financial strain. Her husband, the sole source of income for her family at that point, was forced to take unpaid time off from work to help deal with the medical complications of her son's condition.

"So, we are here to advocate for continued Medicaid coverage for families like ours, and paid family leave, which would have made such a difference for our family had it been available at the time," she said.

Jessica Tolbert, mother of toddler Jayden Tolbert, had come to the rally with her husband, Omar, to represent the state of Florida. "We want to be the voice for babies that aren't able to speak for themselves," Tolbert said. Like many of the parents at the rally, Tolbert mentioned paid family leave, health care, and affordable childcare as some of the major reasons they had come to lobby members of Congress.

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