



For Immediate Release

April 24, 2019

Contact

Madeline Benderev, ZERO TO THREE
mbenderev@zerotothree.org, (202) 857-2994

Denver Contact

Susan Hagar, Hagar Communications
hagarcomm@comcast.net, (720) 935-1777

**Denver 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***

DENVER—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. **Representing the state of Colorado and local *Think Babies* partner organizations, Clayton Early Learning and the Colorado Children's Campaign, Ealasha Vaughner, and her 3-year old daughter, Jer'Riya from Denver, will be joining the event. The family will meet with Senators Michael Bennet and Cory Gardner, and Representative Diana DeGette, to share Ealasha's experience balancing the demands of parenthood without paid leave, staggering child care costs, and adequate programs that support babies' healthy emotional and physical development.**

The Vaughner 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](#).

The Vaughner family will also participate in a similar event scheduled to take place in Denver in the fall. Organized by [Raise Colorado](#), *Strolling Thunder™* will converge on the Colorado State Capitol on Saturday, September 21, 2019. More details on the Colorado event will be released soon.

According to ZERO TO THREE's recent [State of Babies Yearbook: 2019](#), the state where a baby is born makes a big difference in their chance for a strong start in life. Overall, Colorado ranks in the top 25 percent of all states in areas essential to give our babies the best beginning. That positive news is mitigated by the fact that we still fall short in making quality early care available to all families.

"As a single mom, I know how difficult it is raising two children," said Ealasha Vaughner, vice president of the Clayton Early Learning Policy Council, a parent advisory group. "So I'm traveling to Washington all the way from Colorado to give Senators Bennet and Gardner, and Congresswoman DeGette, a real view of why families like mine need affordable child care options, and to urge them to invest in our country's child care system."

Charlotte M. Brantley, president and CEO of Clayton Early Learning commented, "We are proud that the Vaughner family will represent *Think Babies Colorado*, Clayton, Our Educare School and our partners at this important event. Ealasha and her children are exemplary examples of the positive impact of affordable, high quality early childhood care and education on the entire family. Armed with the knowledge that their young children are receiving all they need for healthy development, parents are better equipped to work and provide for their families."

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 Colorado, and across the nation, first."

"We know from nearly 35 years' experience in building public will for policy change, that personal stories are powerful and effective," said Kelly Causey, President and CEO of the Colorado Children's Campaign. "An in-person visit from someone who has first-hand experience can be unforgettable for a lawmaker. We're so grateful that a Colorado family is traveling to Washington, D.C., to advocate for all Colorado babies, toddlers and expecting families."

Babies in America face persistent hardships— such as rising child care costs and lack of comprehensive paid family and medical leave—that undermine their ability to grow and thrive. In Colorado, the average cost of infant care for a single parent is as high as 52.1 percent of their monthly income. These early life challenges follow babies into adulthood.

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 Colorado, visit stateofbabies.org.

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

To learn more about the Raise Colorado Coalition, visit raisecolorado.org

###

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](https://www.facebook.com/zerotothree) or follow [@zerotothree on Twitter](https://twitter.com/zerotothree).

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 on Twitter](https://twitter.com/zerotothree).

About Clayton Early Learning

Clayton Early Learning, a 501(c)(3), is Colorado's leading catalyst in providing early care and education to ensure optimal development for all children, especially those of limited opportunities. We harness the synergy of four dynamic initiatives – classroom and family-centered practices in our school, research and program evaluation, professional development of teachers and leaders, and effective policy advocacy – to spark improved early care and education approaches statewide in collaboration with other public and private entities. Visit www.claytonearlylearning.org for more information.

About Colorado Children's Campaign

The Colorado Children's Campaign is a nonprofit, nonpartisan advocacy organization committed since 1985 to realizing every chance for every child in Colorado. We advocate for the development and implementation of data-driven public policies that improve child well being in health, education and early childhood. We do this by providing Coloradans with trusted data and research on child well being and organizing an extensive statewide network of dedicated child advocates. For more information, please visit www.coloradokids.org.