OUR STORY

Missoula, MT

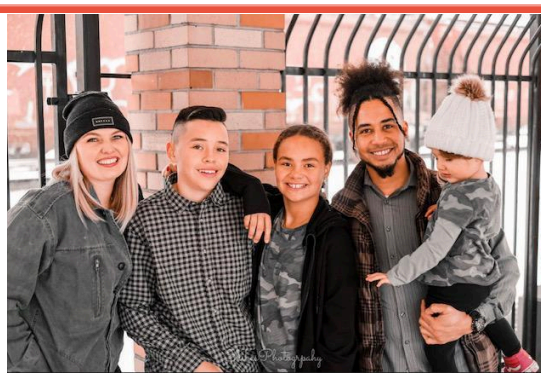
NAME

Meghan Higle

BABY NAME

Estelle Rodriguez

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About my family:

We are a blended family living in Missoula, MT. My fiancee and I combined have three children. Together we have a wonderful 2 1/2 year old little girl, Estelle. We enjoy the outdoors, reading, art, music, and just being together. We are concerned for, and want to be involved in making the world a better place for our family. I wear many hats as an early childhood professional but being a mom always comes first. What a wake up call when I realized I had a child who was in child care and had to go back to work as a child care provider. That's what has brought me here.

Programs and services we count on:

Child care support, Food and nutrition services (WIC and breastfeeding services), Medicaid, and Child Tax Credit monthly checks.

I wish Members of Congress knew:

Starting last August, I went back to work and my child started full time child care. Our circumstances are unique because I am an early childhood teacher at the LAB Preschool at the University of Montana. My daughter was lucky enough to get a spot at the amazing early learning center where I worked for 4 years as I completed both Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Early Childhood Education. Yes, my daughter attends an immaculate program, but can we afford it? Absolutely not. My parents have had to cover my daughter's tuition on multiple occasions. This is because I also work in the child care industry where I simply cannot make ends meet. I am so passionate about this industry and I am even more passionate about not only my daughter, but all children, having the chance to go to an incredible child care program. But they can't. The best programs charge families the most, they pay their employees the most, they have the best materials, the easiest schedules, paid holidays, and in turn; families that tend to be wealthier and have opportunities to make programs such as this work for themselves fill up the spots. As a child care professional with a Master's degree, I work at one of these places. Yet, here I am, still scraping by and burning myself out to help children and families. In January, my fiancee, myself, and my daughter were all home with covid. I missed TWO FULL WEEKS of work and she missed school. Guess what? I didn't get paid, yet I still paid for her child care. How can we expect families to sustain this? I wanted to quit my job so many times this year but I didn't for the simple fact that there would have been literally no one else to take on the work that I was doing. The early childhood industry is at risk of losing people like myself who care so much because the pro's have never outweighed the cons but covid has finally pushed us to the edge where we are very close to leaving this industry for good. We absolutely have to place more value on child care professionals to make sure they stay in this industry and continue to support the families who need them.

Our policy ask:

I urge you to support robust, long-term investments in child care that would support a stronger, more equitable child care system for working families like mine and for child care providers, too.

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 2022, we're meeting with Congress virtually. **Learn more at www.ThinkBabies.org/StrollingThunder.**