

News Release

For Immediate Distribution



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Strolling Thunder Rhode Island: **Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Brings Families with Babies and Toddlers to the State House, Asking Policymakers to Make Young Children a Priority**

Strolling Thunder Rhode Island is part of ZERO TO THREE's national Think Babies™ campaign to bring attention to what babies and families need to thrive.

PROVIDENCE, RI (May 14, 2018) — **Rhode Island KIDS COUNT**, in partnership with **ZERO TO THREE**, is organizing a major advocacy event to bring approximately 40 Rhode Island families with babies and toddlers to the State House. ***Strolling Thunder Rhode Island*** will take place on **Wednesday, May 16, 2018** from **1:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.** Strolling Thunder™ is the flagship advocacy event of the *Think Babies™* campaign, part of a national campaign designed to bring attention to the many issues that affect what babies and families need to thrive. This year our focus is on the importance of high-quality child care for infants and toddlers.

Strolling Thunder Rhode Island Activities — Please join us for any and all of this exciting event, and join the conversation on social media with #StrollingThunderRI and #ThinkBabies!

- **1:00 p.m.** Families will meet at the Providence Omni Hotel to hear welcoming remarks and decorate strollers.
- **1:45 p.m.** Families will stroll to the State House on Francis Street and Smith Street. A Providence Police escort will accompany families the entire way.
- **2:15 p.m.** Families will arrive at the front of the State House (Smith Street)
- **2:30 p.m.** Families will gather in the Bell Room at the State House, which will be equipped with baby-friendly snacks, supplies, and activities, for a meet-and-greet with Rhode Island state legislators.
- **3:30 p.m.** There will be a brief speaking program on child care policy in the rotunda.
- **4:00 p.m.** Families will be introduced on the floor of the House of Representatives and the Senate.

“We’re thrilled to partner with ZERO TO THREE on *Strolling Thunder Rhode Island* – and the timing couldn’t be better,” said Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Executive Director. “Rhode Island is fortunate to have a strong network of early childhood advocates and partners working together to support young children’s early learning and development. *Strolling Thunder Rhode Island* builds on that momentum, and will bring our littlest learners and their families to the State House to advocate for smart policies that provide the strongest possible start for young children.

Primary Advocacy Focus for Strolling Thunder Rhode Island 2018 – Quality Child Care Rates

This year’s primary advocacy focus for Strolling Thunder is high quality infant-toddler child care and early learning. We urge the General Assembly to pass Budget Article 15 which includes \$1.5 million for tiered quality child care rates for infants and toddlers, and legislation that establishes tiered quality rates for all age groups (H-7174 and S-2120). It is important to implement quality rates for infants, toddlers, and preschool age children in order to provide access to high quality early learning environments that promote school readiness and set a course for school success.

Seventy-two percent of Rhode Island’s young children under age six have all parents in the workforce and high quality child care is needed both to support parents’ ability to work and children’s early learning. Rhode Island’s child care rates through the Child Care Assistance Program do not support or incentivize quality child care. It is important to pass legislation so that Rhode Island can join 41 other states that use a child care rate structure that promotes access to high-quality child care for low-income families.

“Now is the time to make this investment in quality rates that support and incentivize child care programs to provide high quality early learning experiences. We are one of only 9 states in the US that do not structure rates to support high-quality child care for low-income children. Research shows that it is high-quality child care that makes a difference to improving school readiness and educational outcomes,” said Bryant.

She continued, “Improving investments in Rhode Island’s Child Care Assistance Program will increase access to high quality early learning opportunities for low-income children by ensuring that programs can attract and retain effective, caring educators to teach our youngest children.”

About Think Babies™

Strolling Thunder™ is the flagship advocacy event of the *Think Babies™* campaign, part of a national campaign designed to bring attention to the many issues that affect what babies and families need to thrive. Key campaign priorities include: quality, affordable child care; time for parents to bond with their babies; healthy emotional development; and strong physical health and nutrition. Our goal is to bring statewide attention to what babies — and families — need to thrive.

Areas of focus for *Think Babies* campaigns include:

- Increasing access to affordable, quality child care for infants and toddlers;
- Ensuring access to paid family leave policies;
- Increasing access to infant and early childhood mental health services;
- Ensuring access to voluntary, evidence-based home visiting for families with infants and toddlers; and
- Increasing access to child and family screenings, supports and linkages to needed services.
- Increasing access to healthy nutrition and obesity prevention initiatives for infants and toddlers.

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About Rhode Island KIDS COUNT

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is a statewide children's policy organization that works to improve the health, economic well-being, safety, education and development of Rhode Island children.

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