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Contact

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

Katherine Linwood Chu, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT
kchu@rikidscount.org, (401) 351-9400

Rhode Island 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***

April 23, 2019 — On April 30, 2019, 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 quality, affordable child care, and comprehensive national paid leave. **Veronica Manfredi**, mother of 1-year old Benjamin from Cranston, will be joining the event. The family will meet with Senators Jack Reed and Sheldon Whitehouse, and Representative Jim Langevin, to share their experience balancing the demands of parenthood and the need for paid leave, high quality, affordable child care, and adequate programs that support babies' healthy emotional and physical development. **Rhode Island will also hold their own state *Strolling Thunder* in Providence on Wednesday, May 1, 2019.** Please see page 3 of this release for more information on Rhode Island's statewide event.

National *Strolling Thunder* in Washington, DC - April 30, 2019

The Manfredi 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](#).

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, Rhode Island ranks in the top 25 percent of all states in areas essential to give our babies the best beginning.

"I'm headed to Washington to remind Senators Reed and Whitehouse, and Congressman Langevin, that my family, and families like mine, deserve access to affordable, quality child care," said Veronica Manfredi. "I want Congress to *Think Babies* and invest in our country's child care system so that parents have the resources they need to build strong 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, positive 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 Rhode Island, and across the nation, first."

"Babies are born with unlimited potential – helping them thrive in their earliest years sets a strong foundation for the rest of their lives," said Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. "Rhode Island has a strong network of early childhood advocates and partners working together to support young children's early learning and development, and we're looking forward to the Manfredi family representing Rhode Island at *Strolling Thunder*! We are fortunate to have a Congressional delegation that understands that investing in the well-being of the next generation by ensuring that all babies have access to high quality health care, and positive early learning experiences, benefits us all – and that investing in family-friendly policies and programs is a critical component. We are very excited to work with ZERO TO THREE, to make babies and their families a priority."

Nationally, babies 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 Rhode Island, the average cost of infant care for a single parent is as high as 50.4 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 infant and early childhood mental health.

To learn more about Rhode Island, visit stateofbabies.org.

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

Strolling Thunder Rhode Island in Providence, RI – May 1, 2019

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, in partnership with ZERO TO THREE, will bring 40+ Rhode Island families with babies and toddlers to the State House on **Wednesday, May 1, 2019 from 1:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.** *Strolling Thunder Rhode Island* is designed to bring attention to the many issues that affect what babies and families need to thrive.

This year's *Strolling Thunder Rhode Island* is focusing on four key policy areas to help families with young children: high quality child care, pre-k, family home visiting, and paid family leave. We urge the General Assembly to increase funding for the Child Care Assistance Program to bring rates up to the federal benchmark for quality, to sustain and expand our high-quality Pre-K program, to invest state funds to sustain proven family home visiting models, and to make important changes to our state's Paid Family Leave program to enable families to take recommended leaves to care for babies.

This is the second annual *Strolling Thunder Rhode Island* – [please click here](#) to see pictures from the inaugural event last year.

The agenda is as follows:

- **1:00 p.m.** Families will meet at the Rhode Island Convention Center for lunch, stroller decorating, and opening remarks.
- **1:45 p.m.** Families will stroll from the Convention Center 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 enjoy Child Care Awareness Day, which will take place all afternoon at the State House. Families will gather in the Bell Room at the State House, which will be transformed into a pop-up early learning classroom, donated by Kaplan Early Learning.

Families will also meet with Rhode Island state legislators and elected officials to share their story.
- **3:30 p.m.** There will be a brief speaking program on child care policy in the rotunda, and performance(s) by talented young Rhode Islanders
- **4:00 p.m.** Families will be introduced on the floor of the House of Representatives and the Senate.

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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.

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. Learn more at www.rikidscount.org, and connect on social media: [@RIKIDSCOUNT](https://twitter.com/RIKIDSCOUNT) on Twitter and [@RhodeIslandKIDSCOUNT](https://facebook.com/RhodeIslandKIDSCOUNT) on Facebook.