

**From rage to gratitude:
A mother's harrowing
journey to save her daughter
(and herself)**

featuring
Rebecca Wood



This time on Code WACK!

In honor of Mother's Day, we're talking about how our dysfunctional health insurance system affects moms. How far did one mother go to ensure that her daughter – born extremely premature – got the critical care she needed?

How did our broken healthcare system push our guest, Rebecca Wood, to delay her own care for the sake of her daughter Charlie, with devastating consequences? How has Rebecca's life been transformed since she [testified before Congress](#) in 2019 about the impossible choices she faced? *This is the first of two podcast episodes featuring Rebecca Wood.*

SHOW NOTES

WE DISCUSS

Welcome back to Code WACK!, Rebecca! For those who may not have heard of you, tell us a bit about yourself.

"I'm Rebecca Wood. I had a pretty ordinary life up until my daughter's birth, I would say. I did all the adult milestones, went to college, got married, and then when I had my daughter, she was born at 26 weeks gestation.

"She weighed one pound, 11 ounces and that was the beginning of, I guess, a giant snowball of change in my life. It definitely launched me into the policy realm unbeknownst to me . . . her birth was the beginning of that. I'm finishing up my first year of law school. I am a full-time law student, and I live in the metro west region of Boston." – **Rebecca Wood**

Your daughter Charlie needed very expensive care from a wide variety of specialist physicians and therapists. Only some of those costs were covered by health insurance. How did you manage?

"When she was younger, it broke us and we had to scrape together whatever we could. And I applied for scholarships to a lot of her therapies and things like that in order to get those for her. And some of them came through, some of them didn't. You know, you just <laugh> you throw out a wide net, and hope you get something.

"And then later on, my husband and I, we separated and got divorced and suddenly I was a single mom and the first six to eight months were absolutely awful. I had to find a way to work without childcare and you know, she was little. So I drove for Uber Eats with her in tow, and at that time, I just could not afford my asthma medication, even like the minimal asthma medication.

I had to go to the ER with her in hand sometimes in the middle of the night. And I asked her recently if she remembered that, and thank God she doesn't, but she does remember when we drove for Uber Eats.

“And then later on, after those six to eight months, I ended up moving to the Boston area where I was a single mom again. And the healthcare expenses in addition to our rent in the Boston area ... just killed us. And things like the school meals or school lunches ... we didn't qualify for free or reduced (lunches) because on paper it looked like my income was good <laugh>, but it didn't take into account my rent, my healthcare expenses and between Charlie and I, we were just a bottomless pit for healthcare expenses <laugh>. And so actually [I started working on universal school meals in Massachusetts](#) because I struggled with school lunch debt and we ended up winning it last summer so that was exciting. - **Rebecca Wood**

You've seen a connection between health care, housing expenses and food insecurity. Talk about that.

“What started as healthcare expenses also had me see how interrelated all of these issues are. I didn't think about food insecurity, but because of my high healthcare expenses, I realized after we got universal school meals that - holy wow - we were a food insecure household. Like I was always counting how many cans of beans did I have in the cabinet?

“And if she got sick and needed medication or something like that, then I would have to think, ‘okay, if I get this medication, what does that do to my grocery budget? Do I have enough food at home?’ And I always had this running count in my head of how much food we had, and I never thought anything of it until afterwards when I didn't have to think about that anymore.

“And I thought, ‘wow, we were food insecure.’ It was so surprising to me, <laugh> and then how they run hand-in-hand with health care or even housing for that matter, all of those things ... - **Rebecca Wood**

Helpful Links

[A Shocking Sacrifice: One Mom's Fight to Change Health Care in America, Code WACK!](#)

[Rebecca Wood's Story, Senator Bernie Sanders](#)

[Paying for your baby's NICU stay, March of Dimes](#)

[Affording the NICU: 6 Ways to Reduce the Cost, Hand to Hold](#)

[Increased Risk of Parental Instability for Children Born Very Preterm and Impacts on Neurodevelopmental Outcomes at Age 12, National Library of Medicine](#)

[Stay At Home Moms Can Earn Money Fast with UberEATS!, Must Have Mom](#)

[Food Insecurity Was Associated With Greater Family Health Care Expenditures In The US, 2016-17, Health Affairs](#)

[Every Child Has the Right to a Free School Meal, Jacobin](#)

Episode Transcript

Read the [episode transcript](#).

Guest Biography - Rebecca Wood

Rebecca Wood lived all over Virginia before relocating to Massachusetts. She graduated from James Madison University and served in Americorps with Virginia State Parks.

Her plans for graduate school were put on hold indefinitely when her daughter, Charlie, was delivered ten hours into her twenty sixth week of gestation. Early on, Rebecca learned she'd have to advocate for her daughter's well-being, whether with hospitals, insurance companies, or social services. In time, she expanded her advocacy efforts into the policy arena.

Ms. Wood's initial civic participation was as a volunteer and, later, a Team Leader with the nonpartisan voter registration organization, HeadCount. However, her first time on Capitol Hill and her active engagement began in January of 2017 when she stepped up to join the fight to save the Affordable Care Act and Medicaid. Since then, Rebecca has worked with many organizations and offices on Capitol Hill.

Her healthcare work includes rallies, protests, press conferences, lobbying, and conventions. Most notably, she told her and Charlie's story at the introduction of Senator Sanders' Medicare For All Act of 2017 and testified before the House Ways and Means Committee hearing on Pathways to Universal Coverage in June 2019.

Rebecca was recognized for her effective advocacy in 2017 by The ARC of Virginia as a Catalyst For Change and was the 2019 R. Ann Meyers Distinguished Social Work Alumni Award recipient. Currently, Ms. Wood is a 1L Public Interest Law Fellow at the University of Massachusetts School of Law. She is a 2024 Rappaport Fellow in Law and Public Policy and the president of the UMass Law NLG chapter.

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