

2022 North Carolina Congressional Candidate Questionnaire

Name: Jeff Jackson

District: NC House District 14

Party Affiliation: Democrat

Current Occupation: NC State Senator; Major, Army National Guard; Attorney

1. What are your views on the needs of young children (prenatal to age 5) and what specific steps would you take to address these needs?

The first years of a child's life are the most critical period for their development. To that point, we need to ensure that children have access to affordable early childhood education, nutrition and health care. When it comes to nutrition and health care, we must support policies like renewing the Child Tax Credit and expanding Medicaid. 15% of children in North Carolina live in poverty. To have an effective early childhood care system in this country, we need to provide support to families struggling to make ends meet. Last year, the American Rescue Plan provided families with young children \$300 a month in refundable tax credits. In just one month, this program lifted three million children out of poverty, cutting the child poverty rate by a quarter nationwide.

2. What steps would you take to ensure that children birth to age five have access to high-quality and affordable early learning programs?

Here are three points from my Early Care and Education Agenda, with the full plan linked here: <https://jeff-jackson.medium.com/our-early-care-and-education-agenda-sen-jeff-jackson-da3cb4b7a47a>

1. Bolster support for the Child Care Development Block Grant Program. \$100 billion for the program will make early childhood care free for North Carolina families earning less than 1.5 times the median income (that's roughly \$80,000) and greatly reduce costs for most other families, covering about nine in 10 young children in the state — about 600,000 children per year.

2. Expand the supply of quality child care programs. Almost half of all North Carolinians live in a "child care desert" where there are few or no options for quality childcare. The current childcare market system is broken — parents pay the majority of the costs but still can't afford the true cost of what it takes to provide high-quality care. As a result, there is little to no investment to develop or expand early childhood and preschool programs in low-resourced communities. Congress can change this. The supply of child care can be greatly expanded through small business loans, grants, tax credits and other incentives. The bipartisan Small Business Child Care Investment Act would make non-profit child care providers eligible to

participate in federal loan programs through the Small Business Administration (SBA) — the same opportunity currently provided to for-profit child care providers. By taking steps like this, we can start expanding the supply of early childhood care and education options for families, ensuring access for all.

3. Build a comprehensive early childcare system that is focused on quality and family choice. Our plan is about making sure that families have the resources, support, and information to choose whichever type of high-quality care is best for their kids — whether public, private, home-care, or Head Start programs. States need to ensure effective child care systems — that includes systems for measuring quality, enforceable standards for different types of care, pathways to licensing for staff, and technical assistance for providers. North Carolina already does a great job with this. The state rates early childcare providers on a 1 to 5 star scale. This easy-to-understand system helps families find the best childcare options for their kids. And it's also been shown that providers who get a low rating one year usually make efforts to fix areas where they fell short and improve their ratings in subsequent years, improving the overall quality of providers statewide. Our system provides a great model that could be replicated nationwide.

3. What steps would you take to stabilize and sustain North Carolina's early education system and child care workforce as we approach the end of the federal child care relief funding?

Alongside the policies I mentioned above, the clearest need is to pay early childhood educators a living wage. The average early childhood educator in North Carolina makes around \$20,500 a year, less than \$10 an hour, and \$6,000 a year below the federal poverty line. As a result, across the country there is an extreme shortage of qualified early childhood educators. Anyone who has had to care for small children knows that it's an incredibly demanding job and worth so much more than poverty wages. To have a functioning early childhood education system, we need to start paying early childhood educators what they're worth. And only by paying them what they're worth can we ensure that we have enough folks working in this field so parents have access to enough high-quality options for their children. Raising the minimum wage to \$15 an hour is a good start.