

2024 North Carolina State Office Candidate Questionnaire

Name: Sydney Batch

District or Office: NC Senate District 17

Party Affiliation: Democrat

Current Occupation: Attorney & Social Worker, Senator

Questions for 2024 Candidates for State Office in North Carolina

1. The most rapid period of brain development happens in the first five years of life, laying the foundation for all future learning, health, and success in school and life. What are your views on the needs of young children (prenatal to age 5) and what steps would you take to address these needs?

The first five years of life are crucial for brain development and set the stage for a child's future success. I believe it's essential to ensure all children have access to quality early education, healthcare, and supportive family environments.

Key Steps:

Expand Early Childhood Education: Increase funding for pre-K programs to ensure every child, regardless of background, has access to quality education.

Support Maternal and Child Health: Improve access to prenatal and postnatal care to support healthy pregnancies and early child development.

Affordable Childcare: Advocate for policies that make childcare more accessible and affordable for working families.

2. Every county in North Carolina is considered a "child care desert" with not enough supply to meet the demand. When parents do find child care, the average cost is nearly \$10,000/year, which is higher than the cost of public college tuition. What steps would you take to ensure that families have access to high-quality and affordable early learning programs for their children?

The fact that every county in North Carolina is considered a "child care desert," with parents facing challenges in finding and affording child care, is a critical issue that demands immediate attention. The high cost of child care, often exceeding \$10,000 per year, places a tremendous burden on families and hinders economic growth by limiting parents' ability to participate fully in the workforce.

Increasing Child Care Subsidies: Advocate for more funding to make child care affordable for more families.

Expanding Pre-K Programs: Increase the availability of publicly funded pre-K to ensure more children have access to early learning.

Supporting Child Care Providers: Invest in better wages and training for child care workers to improve the quality of care.

Expand Public-Private Partnerships:

Encouraging partnerships between the state, local governments, and private businesses can help increase the availability of child care options. These partnerships could involve providing grants or incentives to businesses that offer on-site child care or invest in local early learning centers.

3. Currently, child care teachers in North Carolina earn an average of \$14/hour, less than most retail or service workers. Since 2021, federally-funded Child Care Compensation Grants have provided higher wages and bonuses to more than 40,000 North Carolina early educators, but that funding has expired. This summer, the NC General Assembly appropriated funds to extend the grants for a short time, while also recognizing the need to explore long-term solutions to attract and retain a qualified early childhood workforce. 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 Compensation Grant funding?

To stabilize and sustain North Carolina's early education system and workforce, I would:

Secure Stable Funding: Advocate for state funding to ensure competitive wages for early educators after federal grants expire.

Enhance Workforce Development: Promote training and career advancement opportunities to attract and retain skilled educators.

Foster Public-Private Partnerships: Encourage collaborations to invest in the child care workforce and long-term stability.

4. Working parents depend on child care, and businesses in nearly every sector have identified child care as a critical factor in their workforce challenges. A new study from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation found that insufficient child care is costing North Carolina about \$5.65 billion each year. What are your views on how the issues facing our state's child care system impact the state's economy? What specific steps would you take to ensure that our child care system can keep up with the demand as more working families need child care?

The challenges facing North Carolina's child care system have a significant impact on the state's economy. When working parents struggle to find affordable and reliable child care, it affects their ability to participate fully in the workforce, leading to reduced productivity and economic growth. The recent study underscores the urgency of addressing this issue.

Steps to Address the Issue:

Invest in Child Care Infrastructure: Advocate for increased state investment in child care facilities and services to meet growing demand, ensuring that every family has access to affordable, high-quality child care.

Support the Child Care Workforce: Push for policies that provide fair wages, benefits, and professional development opportunities for child care workers, making the profession more attractive and sustainable.

Expand Public-Private Partnerships: Encourage businesses to invest in child care solutions, such as on-site care or subsidies, as part of their workforce development strategies.

5. North Carolina currently spends approximately 1% of the annual state budget on early childhood programs, including Smart Start, NC Pre-K, and Child Care Subsidy Assistance. Nearly all early childhood programs in every county of the state have waiting lists and only serve a fraction of eligible children and families. What are your goals for overall early childhood funding and/or what types of early childhood programs would you support making an investment in at the state level?

The fact that nearly all early childhood programs have waiting lists and serve only a fraction of eligible children highlights the urgent need for increased funding and expanded access.

Goals for Early Childhood Funding:

Increase Funding for Existing Programs: I would advocate for a significant increase in state funding for early childhood programs like Smart Start, NC Pre-K, and Child Care Subsidy Assistance. My goal would be to at least double the current investment, ensuring that these programs can serve more children and reduce waiting lists.

Expand Access to High-Quality Early Learning: I would support expanding NC Pre-K to ensure that all eligible 4-year-olds can attend. Additionally, I would work to increase the availability of quality child care options in every county, particularly in rural areas where access is often limited.

Invest in Comprehensive Family Support Programs: Beyond early education, I would support programs that provide holistic support to families, including health care, nutrition, and parental education. These programs are crucial for fostering healthy child development from birth.

By increasing our investment in early childhood education and support services, we can better prepare our children for success in school and life while also strengthening the economic stability of families across North Carolina.

6. If elected, what would be your top 5 priorities for 2025?

Protecting Reproductive Rights
Expanding Access to Affordable Healthcare
Investing in Education
Strengthening the Economy
Supporting Working Families