

## 2024 North Carolina State Office Candidate Questionnaire

Name: Felicia Baxter

District or Office: NC Senate District 10

Party Affiliation: Democrat

Current Occupation: Small Business Owner

### 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?**

I support universal access to early childhood education, and if elected, I will work to make that happen. As a single mom, I've seen firsthand the importance of investing in this area, and that's why I know our state legislature has failed us. Investing in our children and their futures isn't a partisan issue; it's a commonsense one. It's disheartening that the supermajority in our legislature has failed to recognize this.

**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?**

As I said earlier, I support universal access to Early Childhood Education. I'll work with anyone who believes in investing in our children, no matter the partisan affiliation, to make this happen.

**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?**

If we don't stabilize our early childhood education system, our children and their futures will face the harshest consequences—and they won't be the only ones. Their parents and communities will also be affected. Without access to quality and affordable childcare, parents may struggle to work, which in turn impairs their ability to support their families and communities. That's why, if elected, I will support making federal funding permanent and will work across the aisle to explore how our state's business community can support this crucial initiative. In states like Michigan, the government and private sector have formed public-private partnerships to make childcare affordable in communities where it hasn't always been. I believe we can achieve something similar in North Carolina.

**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?**

We can't have a strong economy without investing in childcare, and if elected, this will be a top priority. Specifically, I will focus on preventing North Carolina from falling further over the "childcare cliff" by advocating for permanent funding. Additionally, I will work to partner with both the private sector and state government to

develop incentives for the business community to support making childcare affordable and accessible for our hardworking families.

***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?***

Programs like "Smart Start" provide an example of what happens when our state's leaders keep their promises to our children. Since its inception, "Smart Start" has proven to be an effective, well-tested program that has earned every dollar our state has invested in it. If elected, I will work to ensure we double down on this investment.

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

If elected, my priorities will be straightforward and reflective of my community's needs. That's why I will work every day to support our public schools, reduce the cost of living, and ensure that all our families have the chance to thrive.