

2024 North Carolina State Office Candidate Questionnaire

Name: Woodson Bradley

District or Office: NC Senate District 42

Party Affiliation: Democrat

Current Occupation: Realtor

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?

As a mom I know how critical the first 5 years are for our children's health, development, and long term success. One of the most important factors is having the ability to be with your children while also supporting them financially. I believe that healthy, well educated, and safe communities make for a stronger economy and a higher quality of life for all people, and the same is true for our children.

We must start by supporting and prioritizing the health care of mothers before their children are born. This means addressing our maternal mortality rate through legislation like the Momnibus Act, which would invest in social determinants of health, support maternal mental health, increase nutritional assistance, and invest in community based programs to reduce the maternal mortality rate for black women.

Child care is a major issue that we must address however, we must not forget that the best child care often comes from parents themselves. Therefore, we must invest in paid family and medical leave so parents can spend more time with their young children in the critical stages of development. We must not just stop with paid leave, we must continue to invest in child care by investing in child care tax credits and expanding grants to childcare centers to expand access and affordability for all North Carolinians.

Research indicates that the first five years of a child's life is critical for long term brain development and their success in school. If we want to take the investment in our children's education seriously, we must provide them with the opportunity to learn as early as possible. Therefore, we must invest in universal pre-k for all North Carolinians.

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?

I believe this starts with expanding child care tax credits to ensure that we're putting more money back in families pockets. The next step to ensuring that all children have access to early learning programs is working towards universal Pre-K. This starts with providing access for all children currently eligible for NC Pre-K and expanding to all children in North Carolina. We must also invest in programs like Smart Start to ensure that we're creating community based infrastructure to support our growing population and needs of our children. If we are able to expand access to these programs across our state, we can reduce the cost for families.

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?

Our teachers are the backbone of our local communities and economy. We must support them with livable wages to ensure that they continue this critical work. We must work to raise child care teacher pay to the level of kindergarten teacher pay. This can be achieved through permanently establishing compensation grants through the state budget. We must also work to standardize child care teacher standards and invest in their education. This could be achieved through creating a statewide credentialing system for child care teachers, investing in an early childhood teaching fellows program, and tuition assistance for those committed to working in our early education system.

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 North Carolina Chamber of Commerce identifies access to quality, affordable child care as an essential factor for North Carolina's economic success. Child care is an economic issue that we must address to ensure our state can continue to prosper and grow. First, we must encourage businesses to create pro-family employment policies such as paid family and medical leave. We also must ensure that our existing child care system is maintained and encouraged to grow. This can be achieved through extending child care compensation grants, increasing rates, and setting minimum rates for subsidized child care to address shortages in our poorest communities and for low-income 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?

My goal is to increase funding for early childhood programs until Pre-K is a reality for every North Carolina family and until we eliminate child care deserts in our state. This includes investment in programs like Smart Start & NC Partnership for Children, Head Start, Even Start, NC Early Intervention Branch, Nutrition Services Branch of NC, Women and Children's Health Section, and other community based programs that support our children and their families.

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

- Restore Women's Reproductive Freedom
- Expand Child Care Tax Credits
- Expand Access to Paid Family Leave
- Increase Teacher Pay
- Pass Universal Background Checks and Red Flag Laws