

## 2024 North Carolina State Office Candidate Questionnaire

Name: Jay J. Chaudhuri

District or Office: NC Senate District 15

Party Affiliation: Democrat

Current Occupation: Legislator, Attorney

### 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 believe the single best return of investment for government is investing in early childhood education. It's not a red state issue or a blue state issue. It's simply in the best interest of our children, our state, our country. I'd support Governor Roy Cooper's two-year spending plan that proposed \$1.5 billion in new funding for childcare and early childhood education. That includes \$500 million for child stabilization grants that would address the fiscal cliff our state confronted with the end of pandemic. It would include \$128.5 million to create a statewide floor that would increase child care subsidy for rural and lower wealth communities. It would include \$300 million for recurring support of Smart Start, \$26 million for statewide expansion of the Child Care WAGES program, and \$78 million for Family Connects, a home visiting program, among other programs.

**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 the question states, there's both a supply problem and demand problem. On the supply side, too many childcare centers are closing because of the pandemic dollars drying up. Too many child care workers are leaving because they are making \$13 per hour, less than in the retail industry. On the demand side, parents can't afford child care because it costs an average of \$10,000 per year. The funding recommendations discussed in Question 1 would address both the supply and demand size challenges.

**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?**

This past session, the General Assembly allocated only \$67.5 million to extend compensation grant funding to child care providers in comparison to Governor Cooper's request for \$200 million. The final budget failed our earliest learners because there's no new state dollars for child care. In the end, the budget failed parents who can't afford child care, failed employers who can't hire parents, and ultimately failed our young kids who won't get off to a good and healthy start. I'm incredibly sad for our state. The General Assembly should have allocated at least \$200 million per Governor Cooper's budget proposal.

**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 in North Carolina?***

The North Carolina Chamber Foundation made an argument that child advocates have long been making – the lack of child care access hurt not only our children but our economy, too. Today, employers lose \$4.29 billion a year because of job disruptions and turnover related to child care, and the state loses another \$1.36 million in tax revenue. As discussed in Question 1, I would support Governor Cooper’s 2023-24 proposal that would meet our state constitutional obligation of providing every child a “sound basic education.”

***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?***

As my responses to previous questions indicate, we have failed our children by not doing enough to fund early childhood education. I would support increased funding for child stabilization grants, child care subsidy programs, Smart Start, NC-Pre-K, Child Care WAGE\$, Family Connects, summer care and learning programs, and a refundable child and dependent tax credit.

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