

2024 North Carolina State Office Candidate Questionnaire

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District or Office: NC Senate District 22

Party Affiliation: Democrat

Current Occupation: Self Employed, Investor & Fractional COO

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 somebody who has spent my career working for maternal health equity, I am deeply committed to starting this work before birth: I am committed to 1, expanding access to midwifery care; 2, passing the NC MOMnibus Act; 3, expanding Medicaid to reimburse equitably out of hospital birth; 4, making doulas accessible to people who receive Medicaid; and 5, holding hospitals accountable for their outcomes.

I am also committed to fully funding our schools, consistent with the Leandro Plan. This includes 1, Expanding the NC Pre-K program to make high-quality, full-year services available to all eligible four-year-old children; 2, Eliminating the wait list for child care subsidy; 3, Expanding Family Connects nurse home visit program; 4, Expanding the NC Infant Toddler Program for students with disabilities; 5, Improving transitions to school by investing in support personnel and data systems; 6, Expanding funding for Smart Start; and 7, Improving pay for the early childhood educator workforce.

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 strongly support increasing public funds to make NC Pre-K a universal option for all of North Carolina's four year-olds. I also support expanding the program to reach three year-olds, beginning with public-private pilot programs. Early childhood care is an economic issue, and a workforce issue: investing in preschool saves taxpayers money over time, which is why the Chamber of Commerce is such a strong supporter of expanding early childhood options. I support the tri-share cost-sharing model and am eager to expand these pilot programs.

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 the industry, we need to professionalize that workforce and give them access to the same benefits as other workers: a living wage, childcare benefits, educational incentives, paid leave, and health insurance.

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?

There is no question about it: care is an economic issue. I support the Leandro Plan including the steps they outline for early childhood education and childcare.

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?

We have a billion dollar surplus this year, and there is no reason to phase out the corporate income tax. Early childhood education is a smart investment that pays off for our economy, and we should absolutely be using state funds in this way.

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

My platform is built on care: care for children, care for caregivers, and care for our community. Given that, my top five priorities would be 1, improved maternal healthcare; 2, fully funding our public schools; 3, paid family leave; 4, career readiness and job training investments; and 5, access federal funding to build a green future.