

2024 North Carolina State Office Candidate Questionnaire

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District or Office: NC House District 57

Party Affiliation: Democrat

Current Occupation: Legislator

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 have two daughters (5 and 9), so I know these early stages well and how many different variables play into early childhood success! First, young children need the basics (food, shelter, clothing, stable home life). Those imperatives help them focus on learning, exploring and thriving. They must have early and ongoing access and exposure to literature of all kinds so that they can begin hearing early letter sounds, word formations, and sentence structure. They must have opportunities to attend programming such as daycare, pre-school, or orgs such as SmartStart so that they can work on their social skills and be prepared to excel in kindergarten.

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 totally agree - and to make matters worse sometimes the daycare that is available is only part-time whereas parents need to work full-time to make ends meet. I believe I can play a large role in incentivizing more childcare options to operate in our communities via entrepreneurial initiatives, and then ensure they are affordably priced via stipends and other funding mechanisms so that supply and demand better support one another.

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?

I would happily work on a longer-term solution to better pay our early childcare workers so that we retain those currently in the role and attract new teachers going forward. They are critical to our children's success! I would love to see them making more than \$20/hour. I would need to look at the budget and numbers in more detail to figure out a doable solution that will pass, but will adamantly support raising their salary considerably.

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?

Yes I fully agree this is a serious issue, many parents work full-time and over-time on nights/weekends to make ends meet. We need a variety of childcare options across all hours/days to meet their needs and to ensure that children are not left unsupervised. I want to meet with local daycare providers, and executive directors of non-profits such as Smart Start to hear from them what they believe is the right approach to solving this

availability dilemma. They are the experts and boots-on-the-grounds and I welcome the partnership to figuring this out together.

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?

I would love to see public schools offering universal pre-k curriculum for all ages 3+. That's my pipedream, but we can make baby steps to first offer more enrollment options to existing prek programming available (ie more funding to have more staff to support more students). And then work from there - but in my mind it is critical to properly educate/support children ages 0-5 before they insert our public school system to ensure we are setting them up for success Kindergarten onward.

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

My website lists my top 3 (public education; reproductive freedom; gun violence prevention)
<https://tracyclarkfornc.com/>

But my other 2 are definitely housing and early childhood development/education which I see as an extension of my public education priority :) Thank you for your consideration!