

## 2024 North Carolina State Office Candidate Questionnaire

Name: Charles Dudley

District or Office: NC Senate District 3

Party Affiliation: Democrat

Current Occupation: Senior pastor

### 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?**

The first 2000 days of a child's life are critical for their development, and strong support from parents, child care educators and others is needed throughout this time. As senator, I would support strong funding for child care educators to help them gain necessary credentials and additional education, as well as support for families to help them afford good high-quality childcare. As a member of the Coastal Community Action Board Directors for the past six years in eastern North Carolina, I have seen firsthand the advantages that HeadStart provides to young children. We must invest in our future.

**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 would like to study the possibility of child-care subsidies for those whose children attend 5-star and other highly rated centers and programs. I believe we must expand efforts through the public schools as well to ensure that all children have access to excellent early learning opportunities.

**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?**

North Carolina needs to value its educators at all levels. A good solution would be to have early childhood education permanently funded through tax dollars in the state budget. This would provide money for salary increases and oversight.

**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?**

Our children are our future. Parents worried about the care of their children face negative impacts that go beyond financial concerns when they cannot go to work due to inadequate child care. We must show we value early childhood education by putting money into the system through our state budget. As someone with experience working with HeadStart, I have seen firsthand the surplus of children for the number of educators available. We must fund these positions and hold them up as valuable resources for all of us.

**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 believe we should increase programs through the public schools as well as make possible state funding for centers meeting quality goals. One percent is a small price to pay for our most valuable resource and that number must grow. We need to ensure that early childhood education is a profession that is valued and paid. I commit to do just that.

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

1. Fully fund our public schools (Leandro) to include early childhood through university.
2. Expand Medicaid and other health care opportunities, including mental health coverage, with consideration for veterans and LGBTQ+ residents.
3. Expand reproductive health options.
4. Sustain voting rights for all citizens in North Carolina, including those who have completed their sentences for felonies.
5. Work to mitigate the effects of climate change.