

2024 North Carolina State Office Candidate Questionnaire

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District or Office: NC House District 48

Party Affiliation: Democrat

Current Occupation: Baptist Minister, 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?

The first five years are vital in the development and wellbeing of our children. Access to housing, access to nutrition, and access to child care programs are essential to the quality of their development and growth. Far too many children are hungry and on waitlists for child care and education. I believe that we need to work towards additional steps to guarantee children in this state, regardless of zip code, have a chance at success. That foundation begins before they even step foot in kindergarten. I pledge to work with any stakeholders to uplift our children.

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?

All across our state, families are in need of quality and affordable early learning programs. I will work with other members of the legislature to consider additional measures that work to expand the number of child care offerings and to empower the next generation of child care workers. This lack of access is leaving children behind and costing the state billions.

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?

Additional incentives are needed to recruit and retain child care teachers. The grants mentioned above are a great first step and I look forward to continuing to support their extension. However, we need to take additional steps to increase the payment of our child care workers. I will work with all stakeholders to consider public-private partnerships, additional funding opportunities, and other vehicles for change as we work to stabilize the industry. This is something that advocates, employers, and elected officials all have a vested interest in finding a solution.

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?

Far too many people are having to choose between child care and rejoining the workforce. I can think of a number of parents in my community who have unwillingly had to put their careers on hold since they could not afford or find a proper childcare setting. This results in a loss of qualified and talented individuals who desire to work in

their communities. We truly need to consider additional actions to incentivize the opening of additional child care offerings while also working to support longevity and stability for those already operating in this space.

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 like to work with additional stakeholders to evaluate ways in which existing programs can be further supplemented and supported. Additionally, I believe that we must make meaningful investments into activating new workers and new programs that could begin to address the lack of access to quality and affordable care. These programs are truly an investment in the future of our state, its workforce, and most importantly the well-being of our children.

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

Lower the cost of health care and everyday expenses here in this state.

Continue to bring meaningful jobs and opportunities to my district.

Find meaningful investments to help the people of Southeastern North Carolina.

Invest and support our state employees, our teachers, school personnel, and support workers.

Address disparities in the access to child care, education, and healthcare in our state's rural communities.