

2024 North Carolina State Office Candidate Questionnaire

Name: Pricey Harrison

District or Office: NC House 61

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 believe early childhood education is essential and prepares children to succeed in school and life. Additionally, children need access to good nutrition and healthcare services. I would support fully funding early childhood education, supplemental food programs, and health care access for all families in North Carolina.

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 support appropriating funds to help supplement childcare costs for families in North Carolina, and find ways to provide incentives to locate childcare facilities in areas where there is a severe shortage. This would include paying childcare providers and educators a living wage, and providing the infrastructure needed to create safe, welcoming environments where families can feel confident that their children will be well cared for.

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 support making these supplements permanent and cosponsored legislation to extend the funding. The pandemic exposed an existing problem of underpaid and overworked childcare providers. North Carolina has the funds to do better.

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?

Again, it comes down to funding. The economic impact of insufficient child care is made evident in parents having to miss work because of lack of child care, or parents who cannot afford to work because the cost of child care is more than the income they would make from working. Access to child care is critical for our state's economy.

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 see early childhood education fully funded and supported as part of the public school system. I would stop all funding for private school vouchers. I support all of the above programs, and would want to ensure that the state provides opportunities for all children to get a head start, no matter their learning style or special needs.

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

My top five priorities are protecting and restoring our democracy (fair maps, access to the ballot for all of those eligible, and campaign finance reform-most solutions flow from this!); continuing to fight for a clean environment, environmental justice, and addressing the climate crisis; passing common sense gun safety laws; fully funding public education and stopping the flow of taxpayer money to private schools; and improving access to health care for ALL North Carolinians.