

2024 North Carolina State Office Candidate Questionnaire

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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?

Study after study shows us the first five years are of paramount importance. As a mom of five, including one current three-year-old, who has lived experience working full time with an in-home sitter, staying home full time, working with a nanny share, and working with the benefit of a year-round full-time child care center, I have a profound appreciation for the needs of early childhood -- and the challenges of meeting them without safe, reliable care! All children deserve safety, connection, nutritious meals, healthcare, routine, and play. Our policies are failing us: Without paid parental leave, access to childcare and stable housing, and comprehensive healthcare services, our families suffer.

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?

With a lack of adequate federal action on care policies and early childhood, I have been studying how other states like New Mexico are addressing this nationwide issue. We should explore any and all options to help families have greater access high-quality, affordable early learning programs, and I'm committed to elevating and pressing those conversations forward.

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?

In the short term, we should listen to care providers and advocates and continue to stabilize the workforce through grant extension. Long term, we should explore any and all levers to help ensure that early childhood professionals can earn a living wage, from tax incentives to dedicated funding streams to recruitment and professional development programs.

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?

Without child care, nothing works. As a parent of young children, I have seen within my community the impact of our lack of child care options: Some parents are forced to leave the workforce, while others continue to work and then spend an inordinate percentage of their income on childcare. More people are choosing not to have children because of the skyrocketing cost - or are making decisions about employment based on available child care. So yes, child care is absolutely an economic issue. The first step I would take is amplifying this connection. Approaching child care through the lens of economy and infrastructure fosters the coalitions and partnerships necessary to mitigate the crisis.

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?

All families deserve access to safe, affordable care. We cannot continue to burden families with the skyrocketing costs of providing that care -- nor should we expect early childhood professionals to continue to work for a median pay of \$13/hour, average \$14/hour. Our government can and should take the opportunity to invest -- to benefit our kids, our families, and our economy. And without sufficient federal support for early childhood, it is incumbent upon the states to bridge the gap. I support expanding funding for these current early childhood programs as well as strengthening and growing the coalitions necessary for providing families with comprehensive early childhood care and support.

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

Fully funding our public schools, including pay raises and investments in preK; stabilizing and expanding child care options; restoring and protecting reproductive freedoms; and advocating for family-friendly, forward-thinking policy at every turn.