

## 2024 North Carolina State Office Candidate Questionnaire

Name: Rachel Hunt

District or Office: Lieutenant Governor

Party Affiliation: Democrat

Current Occupation: State Senator and College Counselor

### 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 years of a child's life are the most important from a developmental standpoint and we have to do all we can to ensure children have the healthy start they deserve. As Lieutenant Governor, I will establish a Task Force on Families to assemble a comprehensive plan to address early childhood development and work with the General Assembly and DPI to implement those changes.

**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?**

Our current pay structure is driving talented child care workers out of the profession and discouraging prospective workers from entering it. Increasing child care worker pay will help us attract and retain high-quality teachers who can provide the excellent education our children deserve. North Carolina should be a state where child care workers and operators want to teach and grow, not a stepping stone to other states with better pay.

**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 have a longstanding commitment to championing North Carolina's child care and early education systems. I continue to support increased funding for Child Care Compensation Grants, which help support children's developmental goals and parents' ability to work and raise a family. I was disappointed by the General Assembly's refusal to extend COVID child care funding longer, and as Lieutenant Governor, I will make it a priority to provide child care centers with the state funding they need.

**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?**

Accessible childcare is critical for fostering healthy children and a strong economy. As a mother who has raised her children in North Carolina, I am very aware of the financial burdens of child care. I have met with bipartisan groups across the state to discuss our state's child care crisis and will continue to advocate for increased teacher pay and Child Care Compensation Grant funding, which directly support working families across North Carolina.

**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?**

We have to increase funding for these essential programs, investing in children early is how we build strong citizens for the future. Research shows that giving kids these resources early makes them better students, better workers, and less likely to end up turning to criminal activities.

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

- Expanding access to affordable childcare
- Increasing funding for Smart Start and other early childhood programs
- Fully funding Leandro and bringing teacher pay back to at least the national average
- Codifying access to all reproductive care, including abortion, fertility treatments, and birth control
- Expanding workforce development programs in our community colleges