

## 2024 North Carolina State Office Candidate Questionnaire

Name: Ben Massey

District or Office: NC House 93

Party Affiliation: Democrat

Current Occupation: Retired Physical Therapist

### 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?**

My wife was a pediatric physical therapist and worked in early intervention programs and preschools for a number of years before joining the faculty at UNC-CH. Her passion regarding the needs of infants and young children and their families is impossible to ignore. Health and education are two of my major priorities and both encompass the prenatal health of the mother and fetus, easy access to prenatal care, infant screening and early intervention, early learning programs, and support for families of young children.

I've met with leaders in early childhood services in my district and understand the critical impact of the lack of child care facilities, the essential need for subsidies and compensation grants, and the desperate need for a larger credentialed child care workforce. In our area, as in too many communities, we also have many families in crisis without affordable housing, stable employment, transportation, or behavioral support. It is essential that the state legislature step up and assist our communities in developing statewide and local responses to all these needs that impact children and families.

**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?**

This is such an endemic concern that all hands need to be on deck to address this crisis in a coordinated and collaborative manner. Both Federal and State Government need to step up to extend child tax credits, child care subsidies, compensation grants and/ or other strategies to support local child care communities now, but we need long term solutions. Businesses and local governments and community agencies also have a role to play in tailoring programs to the specific needs of each community.

I would like to learn more about other options to grow and enhance early learning and early child care services. I would look to professionals to share innovative ideas and successful models from other states or pilot projects within our state.

**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 this crisis period, we need to work with Federal and State agencies to extend these Child Care Compensation Grants, but we also need to emphasize sustainable, long-term solutions. I support an immediate commitment to a

multi-year budgetary strategy to fully fund the Leandro plan including the early childhood portion for NC Pre-K, Smart Start, and the Infant Toddler Program. Ideally, I would like to find mechanisms to make similar programs available to all children in NC. I suggest we start by rescinding budget allocations to the school voucher program and reallocating those funds to public education including early childhood education as a priority. We need to appropriately value the work of early child care educators and find ways to pay them accordingly.

***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?***

This is a challenging question. Acknowledging the problem is easy but the solutions seem far more challenging. Escalating child care costs have been dumped on working families at a time when wages have not kept pace with general inflation, exaggerating the burden on workers. The costs of providing child care services and the regulatory burden has also (often justifiably, because we want our children to be safe) increased exponentially. This need for child care and cost of child care has grown during a period when the corporate community has shifted their thinking about employees as an expense rather than as an asset worthy of investment and protection.

As a legislator, I will work to persuade businesses to acknowledge the need to see employees as an investment and the essential role that quality, affordable, and reliable child care services are to their ability to attract and retain valuable employee assets who ultimately positively affect the bottom line. I will challenge them to see the advantage to them to participate in the solution to the child care problem their employees experience.

Likewise, I think our state legislature needs to adjust its understanding of the role education, including early childhood programs, plays in the ultimate success of the state's economic future and the need to recognize the value of investment of public funds in sustained, quality, early childhood programs.

***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?***

Our goal needs to be for every child and family to have access to the child care programs that meet their needs and promote optimal opportunity for early childhood enrichment. This problem can be fixed if the legislature has the will to do it and make it a priority, which I plan to do.

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

I entered this election primarily because of my concern about the erosion of the rights of women and the need to reverse recent legislation threatening reproductive freedoms and health. But, my overall goals also include saving our public education system, addressing the housing crisis, working to reduce the impact of climate change, making quality healthcare accessible and affordable to all, and implementing reasonable gun regulations.

You can read more about my priorities on my website: <https://masseyfornchouse.com/>.