

2024 North Carolina State Office Candidate Questionnaire

Name: Ronda Mays

District or Office: NC Senate District 31

Party Affiliation: Democrat

Current Occupation: School social worker

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 that these are the foundational years. Children's skills such as emotional, motor communication, and creativity are developed during this time. A solid foundation is an indicator of future skill development. Early childhood development centers and day cares are vital first steps to a child's education. These programs also help with the early detection of delays children may be experiencing and in turn the early intervention can take place. I would support and introduce bills that focus on funding for these critical years. I would work with the hospitals, businesses, philanthropic groups, and the community to secure funding and resources. Each of these groups have an interest in the development of 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?

There needs to be a partnership with the child care programs, colleges, and universities to provide continuing education and certification for individuals working in the child care field. There needs to be recruitment and presentations at the high school level. This would increase exposure to the field. Students could consider volunteering or working at centers. They may consider operating a child care center in the future. We must find ways to provide grants and/or subsidies and other tax incentives to individuals wanting to operate child care centers.

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?

First this funding must be permanent. It is vital that we have qualified staff in this field. The salary must be stabilized and competitive. I will collaborate with other lawmakers who are in support of this issue to find ways to maintain and increase this funding.

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?

We have to direct more funding to address the low salaries and the certification and training of the employees providing the services to the children. We want all of the programs to provide a quality service for our children. I

would advocate for funding; such as the child care subsidy. I would explore ways that the business community could partner to help with this financial issue.

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 have collaborated with individuals in the programs stated above. I would advocate that we find ways to increase the 1% spending. Universal Pre-K would be an asset to children and families, this is one of my goals when elected. I would like to see these programs located on school campuses. This would help in directing funds to the programs under the education budget line. We can continue to look for funding through other community partnerships and federal funds.

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

Education, Housing, Healthcare, Food Insecurity, Voting Rights