

2024 North Carolina State Office Candidate Questionnaire

Name: Laura Pichardo

District or Office: NC Senate District 23

Party Affiliation: Republican

Current Occupation: Accounts Payable Analyst

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?

Children need the space to play while learning being told stories. Teacher assistances are needed.

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?

Promote flexible work from home policies so that parents can work from home to take care of their kids.

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?

Work with federal officials to advocate for additional grants. Also advocate for a relationship with the unemployment system to promote jobs in education while they are still searching for other jobs.

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 need to promote hybrid workplaces for jobs that can be done from home so that people can work from home as needed.

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 need to keep smart start, NC Pre-K. Apply to grant opportunities for the counties.

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

Payroll laws for bi-weekly paychecks for all employees in the state of NC. Evaluate the option to raise minimum wage. Help local organizations to apply for grants and work on applications. Create funding for teachers in case they need supplies. Work on rural internet opportunities to expand access.