

## 2024 North Carolina State Office Candidate Questionnaire

Name: James A. Roberson

District or Office: NC House District 39

Party Affiliation: Democrat

Current Occupation: Legislator

### 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?**

Health and nutrition which encompasses proper parental care and regular health checkups are critical for the development of children. Nutrition is important as it affects growth, brain development, and overall good health. I would seek legislation to support these efforts especially for kids in vulnerable communities where I believe the greatest need exists. I would support the creation of safe play areas, ensure proofing of homes and childcare facilities and support early childhood programs that will engage parents to be a part of the children's learning process.

**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?**

I will seek advice and work collaboratively with healthcare providers and educators. I will encourage my colleagues to support and create a holistic support system for young children and their families. Through these efforts I would explore the opportunity of incentivizing childcare providers throughout the 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?**

I will work with my colleagues to identify sustainable recurring funds that will help stabilize and sustain our early education programs and better pay for childcare workforce by working collaboratively with my colleagues and other entities such as the community college to place a certification value for those that seek a certificate and/or degree in this area.

**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?**

Currently, the childcare workforce has been negatively impacted as a result of the high cost of childcare which has forced family members to make decision as to whether to work or become stay at home childcare providers. As a result, we are losing a more talented strong workforce that have produced positive outcomes in our local economies. I would support more affordable childcare centers that are designed to support the needs of our

everyday working families. This could be achieved via strong sustainable legislation that places a high value on both childcare and workforce development.

***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?***

My goal for overall early childhood funding is to seek quality childcare services that are affordable and accessible for working families. To seek increased funding for childcare programs and offer subsidies to low-income families.

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

If elected my top 5 priorities would be education, better pay for teachers and state employees. Permanent pay increases for state retirees, enhance Medicaid expansion, seek sustainable and reoccurring funding for early childhood providers.