

## 2024 North Carolina State Office Candidate Questionnaire

Name: Josh Stein

District or Office: Governor

Party Affiliation: Democrat

Current Occupation: NC Attorney General

### 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?**

As Governor, I am committed to standing up for pro-child and pro-family policies. Among other things, young children need food, water, and shelter, stimulating learning opportunities, and quality time with their parents. That's why this year, I've proposed a Working Families Tax Cut, which would reinstate a state Earned Income Tax Credit. This tax credit could benefit over 2 million North Carolinians, including more than a million children, by putting money back in the pockets of working families and lifting kids out of poverty. In addition, I'm advocating for paid family leave so that parents can afford to stay home with their children during those critical early months. When we support our kids, we all benefit.

**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?**

It is imperative that North Carolina's families have access to affordable, high-quality child care. There are not enough child care spots in our state; on average, five families with babies are competing for every single child care spot. Throughout my career in public service, I've repeatedly taken action on child care, and if elected, I would continue to make access to affordable, high-quality child care a priority. As a state senator, I opposed a bill that would have allowed private child care providers to operate without proper licensing and, in turn, weakened accountability and safety for child care centers. In 2020, I urged the Senate to provide at least \$50 billion for child care providers in the COVID stimulus bill. In June, I called on the General Assembly to address the child care funding cliff and prevent the closure of more than 1,500 child care centers, and committed to making the child care crisis a priority of my administration if elected.

**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 am committed to working with the General Assembly to increase funding to address the child care funding cliff, including incentives for attracting child care teachers and raising pay. The General Assembly currently has lopsided priorities with their private school voucher scheme, giving taxpayer dollars to wealthy families to pay for their private schools instead of investing in our public schools or child care. We have the resources to provide higher wages to child care workers and subsidize child care spots; what we need to cultivate is the political will to invest in our kids, our families, and our futures. As a North Carolina parent, I understand firsthand the importance of

affordable, accessible child care. I've also seen how it impacts the workforce first-hand as the leader of the North Carolina Department of Justice. As Governor, I will continue to make supporting families and kids a priority.

***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?***

North Carolina's child care system is the silent backbone of our economy, and when people can't afford child care, they are forced to exit the workforce. Child care inaccessibility costs North Carolina \$5.65 billion in lost economic activity each year, and 35 percent of parents who experienced child care-related disruptions to their employment in the past year reported having to leave the workforce. As a state, we need to create an environment that supports parents being able to go to work, not one that drives them out of the workplace and takes their options off the table. We must increase the number of child care spots available in our state – particularly in rural communities – and we must increase child care worker pay so that we do not lose out on spots due to a lack of staffing.

***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?***

Smart Start, NC Pre-K, and Child Care Subsidy Assistance each represent a different part of the child care ecosystem. As a state, we must support all parts of the system so that these valuable programs do not have to fight for limited resources. While child care access is a complicated problem to solve, we have tools available at our disposal to mitigate the impact on working families.

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

I love North Carolina, and I believe in the promise of this state – if you work hard, where you come from should not limit how far you can go. I am running for Governor to deliver on that promise by investing in our people and their futures and building a state with a thriving economy, safe communities, and strong schools. Working families in North Carolina need affordable and accessible health care, job opportunities no matter their geography, strong public schools, and safe neighborhoods. As your Governor, I will work to deliver the economic security and peace of mind that every North Carolinian deserves by lowering costs, raising the minimum wage, and cutting taxes for working families. I will work to build safe communities by confronting the fentanyl crisis, recruiting and retaining well-trained law enforcement officers, and passing common-sense gun violence prevention measures. And as a state, we must also recommit to funding our public schools and raising teacher salaries. We must invest in career and technical education so North Carolinians can access high-quality job opportunities, whether they pursue a college education or not, and we must ensure our schools have the support staff that they need for our students to thrive.

Thank you for the opportunity to answer these questions. I look forward to partnering with you in the months and years ahead, God willing, to build a safer, stronger North Carolina with opportunity for all of us.

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