

## 2024 North Carolina State Office Candidate Questionnaire

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District or Office: Governor

Party Affiliation: Green

Current Occupation: Retired

### 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?**

Extensive research compiled over many years has identified the importance of early childhood experiences and development in predicting the likelihood of success in education and in adulthood. Adequate nutrition, medical care as needed (including vaccinations against diseases such as pertussis, measles and polio), and a socially welcoming home environment are a necessity for brain and body development that will serve well throughout the remainder of a person's life. The cost to society of not providing these things wherever possible will be far greater than the cost of providing them. North Carolina has a very inconsistent record in providing these services across lines of class, race and income.

Our flat income tax and the reluctance to raise public monies through taxation of wealth does not bode well for having sufficient funding to ensure that the needs of young children are met universally. As governor, I would use the office to publicize the costs of inadequately funding support for children in the early stages of physiological and social development. I would put pressure on the legislature to stop focusing on low taxes and instead concentrate on the future of the state. This includes a return to progressive taxation and a 100% tax on income over some preset threshold (e.g., \$10M).

**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 do not view this as different from the requirements for successful early childhood development outlined above. Our current philosophy of letting the free market solve shortages of necessary services has not worked to solve shortages in childcare, and is an example of what economists define as a market failure. (See for example <https://www.npr.org/2021/12/16/1064794349/child-care-costs-biden-plan>). The costs of providing the service are high, but the profit margins are low. People with capital to invest in business creation see very little return for entering a complex, labor-intensive business with a necessary and unavoidable regulatory environment. Most developed nations have evolved a combination of public subsidized and private services over time adequate to handle the requirements of their peoples. This is not the case in the US. Both the state and federal governments need to accept that if these services are not subsidized by public funds, then we burden our working class with expenses that impact their quality of life and their financial futures. Otherwise, we remain a state covering less than 15% of children that could need access to sufficiently funded, affordable childcare services. (First Five Years Fund 2024 Fact Sheet for North Carolina)

We need a statewide network of childcare centers subsidized by the state and federal government to reduce costs to working parents. The federal government's Lanham Centers, created during WWII when women had to enter the workforce to support manufacturing, were the first and last example of this in the US. A bill was presented to Richard Nixon in 1971 (the Comprehensive Child Development Act) which would have created nationwide

federally subsidized childcare. Nixon vetoed the bill, and no government since that time has done more than talk about the issue.

As governor, I would again seek to educate the public about the issue. The state legislature since 2011 has subsumed unto itself all budgetary power, and has oversight over every state agency. The primary focus of the legislature is low taxes (no taxes eventually) and the reduction of government subsidies that might help the working class or the poor. For the legislature to act, they must feel pressure from working-class parents who need these services. A statewide campaign showing how lack of childcare affects working parents and businesses is needed to provide this pressure.

**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?**

Questions 1-5 are intertwined. The short-term solution for them lies in their funding. \$14/hr is not a living wage in North Carolina, and does not adequately compensate trained teachers and staff for the investment they have made in their education and certifications needed to staff childcare centers. Yet we see that the low profit margins of the centers don't support higher wages absent government subsidy. As governor, I will pressure our legislators to procure a continuation of the funding that supports better income levels for early childhood educators. And I will continue to use the office to educate the public about the need for a vastly expanded childcare network across the state.

**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?**

Obviously lack of childcare options impacts the state's economy, but of equal importance is the impact on the quality of life and the economic future of the family's needing childcare. Solutions to this are addressed further in question five, but there is the possibility, in the absence of state government acceptance of their proper role in seeing that childcare is available to all that need it, of collaborations between the state, employers, and workers that could at least make the cost of childcare more bearable to employees.

The governor's office can raise the public profile of this issue. The Department of Health and Human Services, in response to a 2018 study commissioned by the office of the governor, has developed the NC Early Childhood Action Plan. This plan provides a starting point for public education, and has concrete goals and actions. If needed, I will commission additional supporting work to supplement what is already known. This will create political pressure on the legislature to address the concerns of the business community, as well as the effects on the quality of life and economic wellbeing of the workforce. And I will use the (remaining) appointive powers of the office to place early childhood education and childcare advocates on commissions, boards, and in administrative positions wherever possible.

**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?***

According to an article published by the NC Early Childhood Foundation, the federal contribution post-pandemic that allowed for stabilization of the early childcare centers in NC was \$834M. The amount of emergency funding asked for by early childcare advocates in June of this year was \$300M. They got \$67M. The governor's budget proposal for the same purpose was \$200M. This suggests that the state needs to find from some source or combination of sources around \$1B dollars per year in coming years to expand childcare availability to a level that is adequate to the demands of the labor market and can provide a decent wage (at least \$24/hr) to teachers and childcare professionals employed in this service.

A study by EdNC has identified possible mechanisms for this funding, which shares the burden between the states, the employers and the employees, thus subsidizing the cost for workers. Even this is not ideal, but it is far better than having employees pay the equivalent of a second mortgage to obtain childcare services for their children.

As a guide to identifying early childhood programs that deserve investment at the state level, the NC Early Childhood Action Plan, developed in response to a task force created in 2018, does a good job of identifying the components of early childhood development that need strengthening in North Carolina. Because of budget constraints, NCDHHS has chosen to focus on four of these components in their 2024 update on the progress of the plan. They are the healthy babies initiative, food security, permanent families for children in foster care, and high-quality early learning. There is not necessarily a 100% overlap between these programs and the goals of early education, but if researchers and teachers identified these areas as critical in our current environment, then I would use that as a place to start. I would also push for the state to compete for federal grants, and ask our federal government through our elected officials to step up to the plate and provide money for Smart Start and other Pre-K education programs.

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

My first concern is what I identify as the general degradation of public education in North Carolina, following a decades long campaign to replace the public school system with for-profit educational schools. This trend must be reversed, and the state must stop the distribution of public monies to private schools and charter schools. This experiment failed long ago from the point of view of improving educational outcomes in a broad manner. It's time to end it and fully fund public education in accordance with the Leandro decision.

Labor rights in North Carolina are not treated as a priority. Labor produces all the wealth we take advantage of in our daily lives, but the profits of that wealth are shared with them only grudgingly by employers. We need to remove laws that work against the formation of labor unions, and especially those that prevent public sector workers from bargaining. Our occupational safety and health enforcement, as well as departments that monitor wage theft, are understaffed.

Our population is increasing at rates far greater than we have the housing to handle, which has led to market-driven price increases in housing and rental costs that are not sustainable for working families. In fact, many workers are priced out of housing of any kind, even in cities where they were born. This is a consequence of greed-flation, whereby developers and investors seek to build only high-end housing (and charge high-end rents) that push too many people out of the market. We need to stop investor driven property speculation and development, and instead look at how to make housing affordable for everyone in the state.

Accompanying this development is an increase in pollution and strain on the state's resources. Unbridled development threatens forests, rivers, marine estuaries and fisheries. The strains are creating conflicts between people relying on the state's resources for income, such as fishermen, and the people charged with trying to protect natural resources. In addition, we have many polluting industries, especially agricultural industries, that do

not want to give up chemically intensive farming, or deal properly with the waste from hog and poultry operations. We cannot support this and expect to have a natural, even liveable, environment for future generations. At the same time, the government agencies charged with approving development are constrained by unreasonable deadlines for project impact review, and are also understaffed. This must change.

Finally, the public needs to be made aware of the negative outcomes, both ongoing and potential, of pursuing our policies of low taxes and unregulated development, along with weak educational commitment and environmental indifference. These things are great for people that are already well off, and not so great for everybody else.

North Carolina is not isolated from the rest of the world in terms of global warming, environmental degradation, and economic upheaval. We ignore the future at our peril, and the proof of our commitment to the future lies in the types of industry we develop, our attention to the health and well-being of children of this and future generations, and the degree to which we protect our environment from over-exploitation.

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