

2024 North Carolina State Office Candidate Questionnaire

Name: Donna Vanhook

District or Office: NC Senate District 25

Party Affiliation: Democrat

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?

Having been both a specialized foster care parent and Guardian ad Litem volunteer, I understand the importance of early childhood needs in their first three years. Childcare, pre-k and kindergarten are great ways for youth to learn socialization. They also must have basic needs met. In the case of special needs, funding for wraparound services may be necessary. Equipping parents and/or caregivers with childcare and other resources help youth to adequately develop.

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?

Assess where service gaps are and be sure to support policies/funding that address the childcare needs.

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?

Support funding policies that compensate early learning providers for their work with youth.

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?

Policies directly related to childcare must meet the needs of the most vulnerable and underserved populations. When working families cannot depend on the childcare system to meet their needs, young people suffer, as well as their ability to learn. Caregivers must be able to trust their youth to early childhood providers in order to work. I support childcare legislation that considers access and affordability to working families.

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 support funding all of the above programs, in addition, foster care programs that address youth who have been abused and/or neglected.

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

- fully funding public education
- women's healthcare access to include reproductive freedoms
- rural infrastructure development
- sustainable agriculture
- affordable housing