

2024 North Carolina State Office Candidate Questionnaire

Name: Dr. Lorenza Wilkins

District or Office: NC House District 25

Party Affiliation: Democrat

Current Occupation: Nonprofit Executive

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?

My view is that we need more investments in Early Childhood Education and Development. The steps I will take to address these needs is to fully support universal pre-k and other impact driven cradle to career initiatives.

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?

Improve pay and provide better tax credits and incentives for all key early childhood stakeholders.

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?

Improve the affordability of housing, healthcare, prescription drugs, education, insurance, fuel, and other household expenditures so that citizens have more disposable income.

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?

Fully funding our public schools will help improve the child care system and the economy. Enhancing child care compensation and working with local government and businesses to leverage remote/hybrid work will help meet the demands of 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?

Strengthening community collaboration and involving the business community and higher education are a few of my goals to amplify childhood funding. It takes a village. I would fully support more investments in head start and universal pre-k.

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

1. Fully funding public schools/childhood development.
2. Protecting Women's Reproductive Freedoms.
3. Supporting more mental health resources
4. Improving small businesses growth and economic development.
5. Address climate change.