

2024 North Carolina State Office Candidate Questionnaire

Name: Julie von Haefen

District or Office: NC House District 36

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?

We must be doing more to support North Carolina's youngest children. The steps we take to ensure young kids have access to a quality education and a safe and healthy living environment has a profound impact on their future. I am proud to have introduced and sponsored numerous pieces of legislation related to the needs of young children, including increasing funds for children with disabilities, fully funding the NC Pre-K Program, and increasing subsidy rates so childcare centers can keep costs low and provide more opportunities for children to attend an early education program. In my freetime I volunteer at an NC Pre-K classroom in Raleigh so I can fully understand the needs of our earliest learners, and the needs of our teachers.

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?

As I stated above, I am proud to have sponsored numerous pieces of legislation in support of high-quality and affordable early learning programs. Last year I introduced HB846, which appropriates \$180 million in recurring funds from the General Fund to the Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Child Development and Early Education (DHHS, Division), for each year of 2023-25 to increase reimbursement and administrative rates for the NC Pre-K program. During the 2022 session, I sponsored HB262, which would invest \$30M in funds to the Smart Start Program. I am also a sponsor of HB364, which appropriates \$12.5M funds to expand the NC Pre-K Program. I am a primary sponsor of HB 574, a bipartisan bill to increase the childcare subsidy rate to help lower childcare costs in NC. An increased subsidy rate would allow more providers to improve quality and availability for families.

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?

The General Assembly must do more to provide support and stability to our early education system. I fully support any effort to extend this grant relief to ensure we are retaining and supporting our workforce. Increasing the subsidy rates would also create a statewide floor to help mitigate the inequities between rural and urban counties. We also need to invest in our early childhood education workforce by increasing wages and creating clearer pathways to early education careers.

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?

The early childcare crisis, which is increasingly a significant barrier to financial stability for working families, is only going to continue if we do not properly fund childcare centers and pay childcare providers a living wage. Living in a childcare desert where there is 1. A lack of access to childcare and 2. A lack of affordable childcare is detrimental to working families. Parents should not have to choose between working and making sure their children are in a safe place. They also should not have to spend over half their paycheck on childcare alone. Last year, I filed HB835, which would expand the state's WAGE\$ program to all 100 counties. These salary increases are imperative to support the childcare workforce. I am also the primary sponsor of HB 846, Funds for Pre-K and Smart Start. This bill establishes \$180 million in recurring funds for the North Carolina Pre-Kindergarten Program. I am also a sponsor of HB 569, the Working Families Act, which invests in high-quality, affordable child care, creates paid family leave, expands access to affordable housing & raises the minimum wage so that everyone has enough income to take care of their families and contribute to their local economy.

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?

The General Assembly must do more to provide support and stability to our early education system. We must invest in Smart Start and Pre-K on the state level. I fully support any effort to extend federal relief to ensure we are retaining and supporting our workforce. Increasing subsidy rates would also create a statewide floor to help mitigate the inequities between rural and urban counties. We also need to invest in our early childhood education workforce by increasing wages and creating clearer pathways to early education careers.

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

If re-elected, my top priorities include: ensuring every student has access to a sound, basic education, protecting reproductive rights, passing gun safety legislation, maternal healthcare and working towards a clean energy future to protect the environment.