

2024 North Carolina State Office Candidate Questionnaire

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District or Office: NC Senate District 2

Party Affiliation: Democrat

Current Occupation: State Trooper/ county commissioner

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 on the needs of young children includes seeking legislation funding and education support from pre-k to 12. This focus also includes early childhood development in child care services.

Early childhood education is key to the growth and development of young children. It is necessary to provide resources and accessibility to healthcare, childcare, early education programs, and transportation to meet the needs of parents and growing children before they enter the school system.

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 would work with state legislators to create legislation to lower the costs of early learning programs in addition to enhancing state funding to provide subsidies to aid in the costs of the programs.

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 would continue to prioritize and work with my constituents to appropriate funds that will support living wages for the early childhood workforce to keep up with the long term increases in inflation and cost of living. As a state senator, I would support sustainable long term legislation that directly addresses educational needs in North Carolina. These long term solutions should be implemented with recurring funding along with legislation policies to ensure the stability of child care programs with our workforce.

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?

Early childhood education supports the development of our future. When working parents have accessibility to affordable childcare they are able to continue working and contribute to the economy. If childcare is not affordable some parents then choose to not work which negatively affects their contributions to the state's economy. It is imperative to create a sustainable education program that engulfs children from birth through their post-secondary endeavors.

Many families face the high cost of childcare along with ensuring they can work knowing their children are in a safe environment and receiving adequate education. When parents have to stay home and not work because of the lack of childcare, it directly impacts North Carolina businesses and economy. Parents are less likely to miss work and businesses can thrive having the working class working. It is important that businesses can offer childcare incentives for their employees which the state can help provide better funding. I will support and offer legislation that will help lessen the cost of childcare and provide long term solutions for 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 would support, delve into, and drive legislation that enhances the states' current programs in addition to working with businesses and corporations that would help to support those efforts to ensure that all eligible children and families are served. It not only benefits childcare needs but also provides meaningful opportunities at an early age for children's education. This helps families and businesses boost our economy.

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

1) economy 2) public education 3) women's rights 4) natural resources 5) support for farmers, small businesses and public servants