

2024 North Carolina State Office Candidate Questionnaire

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District or Office: NC Senate District 13

Party Affiliation: Democrat

Current Occupation: Disability rights attorney, Senator

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?

Our policies should be focused on ensuring those first few years of life are filled with rich opportunities for learning and development. My own son's early childhood experience, and diagnosis with autism, taught me a great deal about what a difference early intervention can make in those critical years. I support making those opportunities available to all children, including addressing the critical need to support childcare centers facing the current economic cliff.

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 support expanding availability of voluntary pre-K to 3 and 4 year olds. We can also do much more to establish partnerships among families, business, and government, to ensure that there is adequate support for high quality care.

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?

We simply need to make the investment in bridging the current gap, including through partnerships with the business community, as noted above. The temporary funding was just a band-aid, and is insufficient to give providers the stability to retain high quality staff.

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?

As noted above, the concerns of the business community (including the NC Chamber) are very real and urgent. What is needed is leadership and investment at the legislative level to engage the provider and business community around building a more robust and reliable childcare network.

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?

Failing to invest in early childhood is economically irresponsible. There are well-documented costs associated with failing to invest ensuring access to these high-quality programs. We have to put aside the scarcity mindset that says we can't afford childcare and other high-return investments, and we have to think long-term about the economic benefits and cost savings associated with doing the right thing.

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

My priorities would be similar to efforts from my first/current term: addressing wages and costs for working people, housing affordability, services for people with disabilities, and protecting reproductive freedom.