

2024 North Carolina State Office Candidate Questionnaire

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District or Office: NC House District 108

Party Affiliation: Democrat

Current Occupation: Paralegal

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 need to invest in early childhood education as a state. Affordable access to quality child care not only is essential for children's development it is also essential for the growth of a healthy, competitive workforce. Without child care, parents cannot work and children are missing out on early educational experiences that prepare them to enter kindergarten. One of my priorities is to make sure as a state we are taking the steps to increase funding for affordable and quality access to child care across every single county. By funding early childhood education we are not only investing in our children we are also investing in our workforce and economy.

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 a young adult myself, the dream of being a parent is very much out of reach for me as I cannot afford child care. I would have to choose between my career and staying home with my child. We cannot expect families to choose between work and their children. We have to invest in affordable child care. We can do this by funding programs like Smart Start to provide the statewide infrastructure to support early childhood education and care. This will not only help children with the early childhood education they need for developmental goals but also help parents who are working to provide for their 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?

We as a state should be making the investment not only in our children but also their teachers. For far too long so many early childhood educators have not been valued and respected. No educator should have to work a second job to make ends meet. I will work tirelessly to invest the proper funding into our early childhood education and workforce. Educators deserve a livable wage and good benefits. They are at the forefront of educating our children. We cannot continue to let highly qualified and skilled educators leave North Carolina, as our youth needs them. I will work to make sure we are investing in our youth by ensuring proper funding for our early childhood education system.

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?

Investment in early childhood education is what it will take to make sure we as a state are upholding our obligation to its children and citizens. If we do not have affordable child care for our citizens how can we expect North Carolina's economy and workforce to continue to develop and grow. I will work to make sure we have the appropriate funding in place to support working families and children. I would work to increase child care subsidy assistance.

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?

We have to invest in affordable child care. We can do this by funding programs like Smart Start to provide the statewide infrastructure to support early childhood education and care. This will not only help children with the early childhood education they need for developmental goals but also help parents who are working to provide for their families. I would work to increase child care subsidy assistance. North Carolina must take steps to make sure we are providing adequate funding to early childhood education programs to invest in our children and working families.

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

Workers Rights. Higher Wages. Affordable Housing. Investing in our public/early childhood education systems. Protecting Our Fundamental Rights.