

2024 North Carolina State Office Candidate Questionnaire

Name: Jill Brown

District or Office: NC House District 19

Party Affiliation: Democrat

Current Occupation: Former RN

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?

Prenatal care is the foundation of healthy brain development. A healthy pregnancy requires prenatal care, health monitoring, and nutritional support. Parents, especially first time parents, need to receive education of prenatal and postnatal care to ensure a successful pregnancy and birth. Nutritional needs are crucial, education and support for breastfeeding are essential to ensure a healthy breastfeeding relationship. Data shows that breast milk is far superior to artificial formula for brain development and overall health of the infant through early childhood. Providing a safe environment, plenty of physical closeness, and creating a strong bonding between parent and child foster a sense of security that is important to allow for exploration and learning. Throughout the early childhood years, developmental stimulation, socialization, education, and physical activity are all vital to proper development in the preschool years and beyond.

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 am a strong advocate of universal preschool. Children are our future and early childhood education is a strong foundation for success throughout the child's school career and adult life. We have a culture and economy that requires middle and lesser caste families to have a two income household for survival. Governing bodies need to progress and change to meet the needs of its citizens. Parents shouldn't have to be burdened with high cost childcare and early education in the wealthiest county in the world. The high cost of childcare disproportionately affects the poorest members of society. Many rural and economically depressed areas also lack access to care which negatively affect the community and perpetuates the economic shortfall.

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 will advocate to secure ongoing state and federal funding for early education and child care. Increasing rather than lowering the tax rate for businesses could generate the revenue necessary to fund early education and care. Additionally, seek grants and alternative funding. Ideally, federally guaranteed universal pre-k should be sought and fought for.

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?

Push for increased state and federal funding. Expand childcare subsidies for middle and low income families. Encourage employer involvement and on-site child care or offer child care benefits and allow for flexible work schedules.

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?

As I said previously, I am an advocate of universal pre-k and I would work toward securing funding on a state level.

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

- Expand pre and post natal care
- Increase funding for pre-k programs
- Expand access to childcare
- Invest in school facilities
- Increase wages and affordable workforce housing