

## 2024 North Carolina State Office Candidate Questionnaire

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District or Office: NC House District 115

Party Affiliation: Democrat

Current Occupation: Assistant Director of Admissions at UNC Asheville

### 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?**

Children cannot learn or grow if their basic needs are not met. I will continue to fight for healthcare access, clean air and water, free school lunches, and better funding for capital needs of schools and daycares. Beyond that, we need to invest further in our state's safety net programs to support all families, including housing, unemployment, and Medicaid, which all have a proven positive impact on early childhood development.

**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?**

The state legislature should increase funding for childcare subsidies. Quality child care is expensive to provide but benefits our entire community, so we should support those businesses and help families access the necessary care. We can also provide better assistance to families interested in providing quality in-home childcare to open up more spots.

**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 was proud to vote to extend childcare funding this last session so we can keep those centers open. While the emergency funding bill didn't match the original levels provided during the pandemic, I am hopeful that we can come back this Fall and provide additional funding. I will continue advocating to make that funding permanent. We should also fund loan forgiveness programs for students interested in pursuing a career in Early Childhood Education to keep the workforce growing.

**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?**

Having strong childcare centers available to families is a win-win-win: the kids benefit from the programs, the parents can continue to work, and employers don't have to scramble to find workers. We should continue to work with businesses to encourage participation in the tri-share model, where government, business, and employees all contribute to childcare costs. We should increase pay for childcare workers and early childhood educators so those

jobs are more stable and have less turnover. With a stronger workforce, centers can expand to underserved communities and can increase their open hours to accommodate parents with various shifts and odd hours.

***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 need to increase funding for early childhood programs. I would absolutely support making an investment at the state level. We need to improve the reimbursement rates for NC Pre-K so more eligible students can actually access it, and we need to fill the gap of the compensation grants that are running out from the federal government.

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

- Using taxpayers dollars to pay for public schools, not for private school vouchers.
- Raising pay and lowering taxes for working families.
- Improving our state's safety nets (unemployment insurance, housing and childcare subsidies).
- Increasing transparency and accountability in state government, including nonpartisan redistricting, restoring access to public records, and fighting against corruption.
- Protecting reproductive freedom and access to abortion, IVF, and birth control.