

2024 North Carolina State Office Candidate Questionnaire

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District or Office: NC House District 27

Party Affiliation: Democrat

Current Occupation: Educator, Fellow

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?

Some of the needs for children ages prenatal to age 5 include quality nourishment, opportunities to engage with other children and learn prior to starting K-12 and safe housing. To achieve this, it starts with making sure that the parents have access to safe housing and are able to obtain nourishment from milk to quality solid foods. Child care facilities should have employees that are paid a living wage and have opportunities to have personal improvement and child safety trainings.

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?

To make sure that families have access to high quality and affordable early learning programs, we have to first increase subsidy rates to address child care providers' pay and increase the affordability of child care facilities. From there we have to take the burden off of families and make the process of finding and applying for childcare programs easier.

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?

As we approach the expiration of the Compensation Grant funding, we should think about ways to sustain this moving forward to retain our child care workforce. Child care is and should be a priority for our General Assembly. To address the issue and work to prevent it, we should be using the projected surplus and making lines in future budgets to allocate funding towards child care facilities and needs.

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?

Our state's child care system has a huge impact on our state's economy. If parents aren't able to find appropriate child care, they won't be able to reliably participate in the workforce, However, if the cost of child care is too expensive, they won't be able to maintain it or will have to sacrifice other factors that will cost them their quality of life. To address the current situation, we have to start by paying our childcare workers more so we can retain quality staff. We have to allocate money towards our child care workforce to prevent closures and deserts so

parents can have reliable care to maintain work. Lastly, we have to subsidize the cost of care so that it's affordable for working class 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?

My goals for overall early childhood funding are to make sure that this is a pressing issue for the General Assembly and that we're investing into it in the present while making steps to preserve it in the future. I specifically want to make sure there are early childhood programs that are available to working families in rural areas.

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

When heading into the General Assembly my top 5 priorities for 2025 are making sure that our public education system is fully funded, people in rural areas have access to affordable healthcare and housing, addressing class mobility issues for working families, and protecting the right to vote.