

## 2024 North Carolina State Office Candidate Questionnaire

Name: Diamond Staton-Williams

District or Office: NC House District 73

Party Affiliation: Democrat

Current Occupation: Nurse, Representative

### 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?**

The first thing young children need is healthy parents. Ensuring access to great maternal healthcare is vital to ensuring that children are born healthy. In addition to this, parents need paid family leave and good wages and healthcare as their child ages. I have been fighting for all of these things in the general assembly through my work for accessible healthcare and co-sponsoring the Working Families Act. I have also pushed for expansion of pre-k which would help our youngest learners build a strong foundation as they enter school.

**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?**

Childcare is a critical resource for working families, and as covid-related federal funding for childcare has sunset, this issue is more pressing than ever before. I think the first step is to stop playing games with public dollars (like ineffective voucher schemes) and instead invest that money where we really need it: in public education, especially for our youngest learners. Headstart and NC Pre-K are research proven, we just need to invest money there.

**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 fully support allocations that can increase wages for workers and offset some of the costs for families. The reality is that, even though subsidizing childcare might seem fiscally irresponsible, the investments actually yield high dividends in children who are more successful in school, parents who are able to focus on their jobs, and more.

**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?**

The reality is that our general assembly has spent well over a decade actively denigrating the people who spend much of their time caring for our children, all the while also starving them of resources to be successful. Colleges of Education for all age-groups, including early childhood, are shrinking or disappearing altogether. To get us back on track, I fully support the Leandro Plan, which proposes a variety of interventions for children

birth-kindergarten, including clearing the childcare subsidy waitlist, increased funding for Smart Start, as well as expansion of NC Pre-K.

***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?***

I support the Leandro Plan in its entirety, including and especially, the part about early childhood education.

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

My top priorities are healthcare access, reproductive rights, economic development, education, and infrastructure.