

**UE Local 150, NC Public Service Workers Union
2026 State Legislature Candidate Questionnaire
Candidate: Maria Cervania – NC House 41**

1. Do you support rolling back the tax cuts for the wealthy and corporations that started in 2013? Why or why not?

Yes. Continuing to cut revenue while North Carolina struggles to adequately fund public education, healthcare, infrastructure, and our state workforce is not sustainable. Tax policy should be fair and fiscally responsible. Corporate and high-income tax cuts should be reassessed so that those who have benefited most from our state's growth contribute their fair share. We cannot continue reducing recurring revenue while expecting state agencies and local governments to do more with less.

2. Do you support paying state employees a minimum living wage of \$25 per hour, and raising wages for all state employees by at least 20%?

Yes to establishing a true living wage for state employees and providing substantial salary increases. An idea I have discussed is to use the MIT Living Wage Calculator to establish a baseline. Then, there should be at least 20 percent, while taking into consideration low salaries, salary compression, recruitment difficulties in certain areas, and recognizing employees who have not had good raises for a long time. North Carolina cannot recruit and retain a robust workforce if state employment does not provide economic security.

3. Would you support a 7-Year Step Plan for DHHS workers?

Absolutely. There are several reasons why the Department of Health and Human Services is facing issues similar to those that led other state agencies to adopt structured compensation programs. The introduction of such a program (or any effort to improve the current situation) will benefit DHHS employees by providing opportunities for career growth and helping the state retain competent staff.

4. Do you support raising the minimum stipend for UNC System graduate workers to at least \$27,000 for a yearly contract?

Yes. Graduate students play an important role as teachers, researchers, and members of the academic community in our universities. The pay for such work should reflect their importance and the real cost of living. As noted earlier, using the MIT Living Wage Calculator would be beneficial. A decent minimum pay level should be set and reviewed periodically.

5. Do you support repealing data-center tax incentives, preventing Duke Energy from shifting data-center costs to other customers, and banning new data centers statewide?

Ending special tax treatment for data centers and protecting residential and small-business customers from subsidizing the enormous electricity demands of large-load customers are important steps.

I believe in local decision-making, even though my personal stance is to impose a conditional restriction, a limited prohibition, or a full ban on data centers. A statewide ban on the construction of new data centers should be at the discretion of municipalities or counties. It is crucial to develop rigorous state-level standards for location, water and energy use, transparency, environmental protection, and local reviews. But above all else, it is necessary for data centers to pay the actual cost of grid power.

As a reference, my policy work has focused on making large-load customers bear their costs, local review, water protections, and closed-loop cooling. The General Assembly's fiscal analysis now also estimates that the existing data-center equipment exemptions amount to roughly \$31 million annually, while the 2026 budget separately repealed the electricity exemption.

6. What will you do to make election maps less partisan, make voting less complicated, and increase transparency?

An independent redistricting process with standards that put the voter ahead of the politician is required in North Carolina. Voters should pick their representatives and not the other way around.

Early voting should be protected; voter registration and voting should be straightforward and accessible; election administration should be adequately funded; and changes to election law should be transparent and understandable. Confidence in elections depends on both secure elections and voters' ability to participate without unnecessary barriers.

7. Will you support a cap on healthcare reimbursement rates and demand that Congress enact Medicare for All?

Absolutely. Reducing high healthcare costs requires using tools such as reference-based reimbursement rates and other cost-cutting measures, while ensuring continued access to essential providers, including rural hospitals and safety-net providers.

This session, I filed **HB 1175, the Affordability in Healthcare Act**, which includes a North Carolina low-cost healthcare plan option and uses reference-based reimbursement rates tied to Medicare or other objective third-party standards, with protections for rural and critical-access providers. The bill reflects the need to directly address what patients and families are paying for healthcare while protecting access and quality.

Universal healthcare coverage is also a goal worth pursuing. While Medicare for All requires federal action, Congress needs to continue moving toward universal, affordable healthcare while ensuring access and quality.

8. What is your plan to retain state employees, especially in DHHS?

Compensation is very important; however, retaining staff cannot be done by salary alone. According to North Carolina, there should be fair compensation, a reasonable salary increase, enough staffing, reasonable workload, safe working conditions, good benefits, and professional development.

As far as the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) is concerned, there are usually many vacancies. Vacancies increase workloads for the employees who remain. This situation can be resolved only through proper funding for salaries and staffing.

9. What would you do to protect workers from suppression of speech, discrimination, and unfair workplace practices?

Academic freedom, freedom of speech, and the pursuit of inquiry require protection. The government must not interfere in legitimate academic inquiry or use political ideology as a basis for hiring.

Just as crucial is the strict implementation of protections from discrimination and retaliation at work. Diversity and equal opportunity must not be viewed as competing concepts. Workplaces need to ensure that hiring and promotion are fair, that discrimination is addressed, and that people are judged on merit.

10. Do you support repealing G.S. 95-98, the prohibition on public-sector collective bargaining?

Yes. Public employees should have the ability to organize and collectively advocate for wages, benefits, safety, and working conditions. The ban on collective bargaining for North Carolina public sector workers is quite stringent. Section 95-98 of G.S. must be struck down and a more reasonable law regarding public sector collective bargaining instituted.

11. Would you support eliminating university employee parking fees and student fees for graduate workers?

It should not be necessary for employees to pay to show up to work. As a bare minimum, employees who are required to attend in person should be able to afford parking or transportation.

Student fees that are mandatory for graduate students are worth reviewing, especially if they reduce the minimal stipend they receive.

12. How would you preserve students' right to protest freely and openly on campus?

Peaceful protest and the expression of ideas are basic Constitutional rights, including at public universities. Regulations should not curtail speech merely because it is contentious or because it criticizes people in authority.

There is an obligation on the part of universities to ensure safety and that teaching and learning can take place. Policies regarding protests need to be clearly defined and neutral on content.

13. Do you support full funding for Occupational Safety and Health? Why?

Yes. Workplace regulations are of no use without having sufficient numbers of enforcement officers and inspectors. North Carolina's occupational safety and health regulatory system should be adequately funded to conduct inspections, investigate complaints, and provide employers with technical assistance to prevent workplace accidents.

The safety of workers is not only a moral obligation but also an effective economic policy, since preventing workplace accidents is more cost-efficient than dealing with their aftermaths.

14. Do you support an enforceable excessive-heat workplace safety rule?

Yes. Extreme heat is a growing concern among workplace hazards, especially for agricultural laborers, construction workers, public workers, and other outdoor workers whose work environments are not sufficiently cool.

There must be a heat standard that provides workers with proper hydration, rest periods, education and training, acclimation, emergency procedures, and protective gear. These standards must be based on scientific studies related to occupational health.

15. Do you support Civil Service Board protections for municipal employees?

Indeed, more due process rights and job protections should be accorded to municipal employees. Municipal employees should not have their means of living jeopardized either arbitrarily or politically. Meaningful civil-service protections can provide stability while preserving appropriate accountability for employee performance.

16. What would you do about housing affordability? Would you support allowing rent control in North Carolina?

Housing affordability requires action on several fronts. North Carolina needs more housing at different price points, preservation and expansion of affordable housing, infrastructure that supports housing development, stronger assistance for first-time homebuyers, and protections against displacement.

Local governments should also be granted more power to address their own housing markets by including tenant protection and well-designed rent stabilization measures. Raleigh should not blindly forbid all communities from pursuing such measures. Any rent stabilization program would need to provide tenant protections without discouraging the production of necessary housing.

17. Do you support fully covered dental and vision benefits for state employees, including UNC employees and graduate workers?

Yes. Dental and vision services are part of healthcare services. Postponing both may result in further complications. Employees of the state should receive quality and affordable coverage for dental and vision care services.

Healthcare expenses for graduate workers should also be viewed as a whole. Given that universities rely on them for both teaching and research, it would be wrong if their healthcare expenses took too much from their modest salaries.