

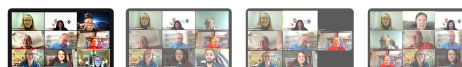
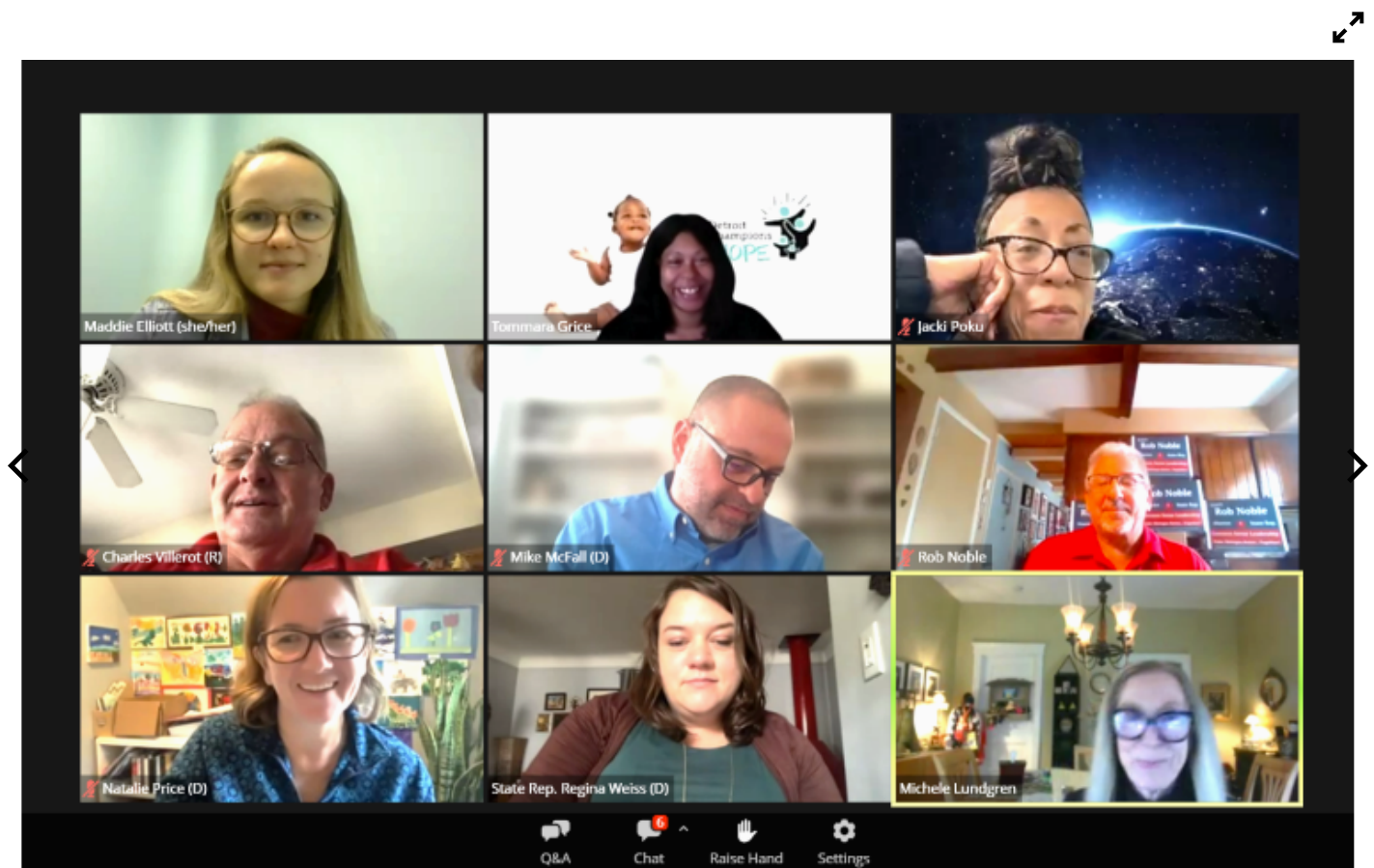


Metro Detroit

Parents ask Michigan candidates the hard questions about early child care and education

Here's how they responded to child care affordability and universal preschool

SARAH WILLIAMS | FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 30, 2022



Parents are used to being their children's most vocal advocates, so it was of little surprise that they held Michigan's electoral candidates accountable in their questions at a forum recently. Public school funding, tax credits, equal access to mental health support for young children, living wages for child care workers, and abortion laws were all on the agenda.

On Sept. 26 Detroit Champions for Hope, in partnership with Michigan's Children, hosted a virtual forum where parents could ask local candidates running for Michigan's State House this November about the issues on families' minds. Congress of Communities in Southwest Detroit and Think Babies Michigan also sponsored the events.

An early childhood initiative of the Hope Starts Here Framework, Detroit Champions for Hope connects parents and caregivers to resources and advocacy, supporting them as children's first champions. Michigan's Children works in pursuit of public policy in the best interest of children and families from cradle to career. The nonprofit is collaborating with local partners across the state to host candidate forums led by youth and parents leading up to the election, raising issues affecting families and communities. A similar forum featuring Michigan Senate candidates will be held on Oct. 24.

The candidates in attendance represented eight different House districts, all touching at least a portion of Detroit. Some are seeking re-election, while others are running for the first time. We've listed them here according to the district they hope to represent in Michigan's newly drawn map released earlier this year by the Michigan Independent Citizens Redistricting Commission (MICRC).

In attendance was Rep. Tyrone Carter D- (District 1), Rep. Regina Weiss, D- (District 6), Charles Villerot, R- (District 6), Mike McFall, D- (District 8), Rob Noble, R- (District 8), Natalie Price D- (District 5), Rep. Abraham Aiyash D- (District 9), and Michele Lundgren R- (District 9). Not all candidates stayed for the entire forum, but here's what they said about affordability in early child care services and universal preschool.

Question: What kind of support have you, as candidates, been thinking about or already working on, both for child care affordability and universal preschool for Michigan?



Regina Weiss pointed to her work as Minority Vice Chair on the School Aid / Michigan Department of Education Subcommittee on Appropriations over the last few years, helping to expand the Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP) to create more available slots for eligible four-year-old children, and to pay providers.

"The goal is to continue to expand, and eventually get to universal pre-K, which I am very supportive of," she says. "We are on track to do that, and we have been working on that." Increasing the number of providers, and expanding access to affordable child care services throughout the state has been a big priority of the governor, she says, and work has been done, but there's still more to do.

"I'm very supportive of making sure we are putting those critical investments into that early child care space, because we know that child care runs everything. It's critical for our kids," she said, and "if parents don't have access to affordable child care, they don't have the same kind of economic opportunity... and that affects the rest of our economy."

Mike McFall agreed that free or "very affordable" child care is a priority.

"I support universal preschool as well. We have a lot of parents that are struggling with their child's education and affording child care. I think we need to be looking at things we can do with employers here in Michigan to see if there's some sort of tax credits if they provide child care," he said.

"Our children are our number one asset here in the state of Michigan, and education is extremely important. If we don't start them off on the right path, we know from studies, they don't always go on to advanced education because of that."

Charles Villerot said help is needed. "I realize there are single parents out there in particular, that are boxed into a wall, and what are they going to do for help? The first place I would always go to is a place such as the Boys and Girls Club, or Metro Detroit Youth Clubs and talk to those people there," he said.

"They have a lot of services, and a lot of good ways to point to what the services are that are available, and use those first. Also with the Salvation Army." From child care worker shortages to affordable housing, Villerot said, he agrees, it's "a multi-faceted problem."



Natalie Price said not paying educators enough is a "fundamental flaw in the way our

society is setting priorities," and that we're losing quality educators who can't afford to put their own young children into daycare. She's in favor of access to affordable child care, and says universal preschool is "absolutely essential," the right thing to do, and makes financial sense for Michigan.

"We can look to research that shows it saves our society resources and money in the long term," she said. "When children get good quality preschool at a young age, their success and their contributions to our economy in the long term are significantly higher."

Rob Noble said people need to be able to get to work and earn a living, and that we should look to corporate America, here in the Detroit area, to "start kicking in a little bit more to help their employees who have this problem. I think that's fair and equitable," he said. As far as state support around these issues, "If it's in the budget, absolutely."

"If we do it on a state level, I'm all in," he said. "I think we just need to be very transparent to make sure we know where those funds are going."

Abraham Aiyash said investing in early child care and pre-K education is "the best and biggest economic development project we could ever put our resources towards" in the state of Michigan. We also need to start having a conversation around supporting families who may choose nontraditional child care, he said, who rely on their cultural communities rather than an established child care center or facility.

"In a lot of communities in Detroit, whether they're Middle Eastern, South Asian, the Latiné, or the Black communities, they're sometimes more comfortable running their own systems and doing their own programming," he said. "Those people should still qualify for child care funding, and for child care support."

Check out the rest of this series to learn how these candidates responded to more questions from parents around early child care and education. This community conversation has been edited for clarity and brevity.

This entry is part of our Early Education Matters series, exploring the state of early education and childhood care in our region. Through the generous support of the Southeast Michigan Early Childhood Funders Collaborative (SEMI ECFC), we'll be reporting on what parents and providers are experiencing right now, what's working and



what's not, and who is uncovering solutions.

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