



Jackson County Continuum of Care

JACKSON COUNTY CONTINUUM OF CARE

LETTER OF SUPPORT FOR OREGON HOMELESS STUDENT LEGISLATION- HOUSE BILL 4149

February 2, 2026

House Committee on Education

Honorable Chair Hudson, Vice Chairs Dobson and McIntire, and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Jackson County Continuum of Care, we write to express our strongest possible support for the proposed legislation to codify educational protections for homeless students in Oregon state law during the 2026 legislative short session.

As a critical component of the continuum of care working to end homelessness in our community, we witness daily the devastating impact housing instability has on our most vulnerable population—our children. In Jackson County alone, 1,647 students were identified as experiencing homelessness during the 2024-25 school year, making us the county with the 5th highest number of homeless students in Oregon despite being only the 6th largest county by population.

Children: Our Most Vulnerable Population

Children experiencing homelessness often fall outside the chronically homeless definition, yet they face profound challenges that threaten their development, education, and future prospects. For these children, school represents far more than just an educational institution—it is often their only source of stability, consistency, and support in otherwise chaotic lives.

Schools as Essential Anchors

For homeless children, schools provide:

- Consistent access to adequate nutrition
- Relationships with caring, supportive adults
- Critical connections to community resources and safety net services
- A sense of normalcy and belonging amid housing instability
- Academic support to prevent falling behind despite challenging circumstances



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Our Continuum of Care has witnessed firsthand how schools serve as vital hubs connecting vulnerable families to essential services. The partnerships between school districts, communities, and county agencies are instrumental in our collective efforts to end housing instability.

The Urgent Need for State Legislation

While federal protection exists through the McKinney-Vento Act, these protections remain vulnerable to policy changes and funding fluctuations. The alarming statistics speak for themselves:

- 21,122 Oregon students (3.9% of all K-12 students) experienced homelessness in 2024-25
- An estimated 6,357 children aged three and under are experiencing homelessness in Oregon
- Only 17.8% of homeless infants and toddlers are enrolled in early childhood programs
- Homeless students have a 56.4% chronic absenteeism rate compared to 33.5% for all students
- Only 61.3% of homeless students graduate high school compared to 81.8% of all students

Oregon has the opportunity to demonstrate leadership by codifying these essential protections into state law, ensuring that regardless of federal policy changes, our most vulnerable children will continue to receive the support they need to succeed academically and break the cycle of homelessness.

Our Commitment

The Jackson County Continuum of Care is committed to supporting this legislation as part of our comprehensive approach to ending homelessness. We firmly believe that by protecting educational access and support for homeless children, we are making a critical investment in breaking intergenerational cycles of poverty and housing instability.

We urge you to support this vital legislation. Oregon's children deserve nothing less than our full commitment to their education, well-being, and future success.

Respectfully submitted,

Ann Marie Alfrey, Vice Chair

The Board of Directors

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