

Sarah Arbuckle

HB 4149 | Codifying McKinney-Vento

House Education Committee

Chair Hudson, Vice Chairs Dobson and McIntire, and esteemed members of the committee, for the record, my name is Sarah Arbuckle and I am here today to testify in a personal capacity, in strong support of House Bill 4149.

I worked as a Program Analyst on the McKinney-Vento team at the Department of Education before coming back to the legislature in 2024. In this role, I supported school districts across Oregon in accessing and using federal American Rescue Plan funds designated for homeless children and youth during the pandemic. I created reimbursement forms and guidance that allowed districts to successfully claim these funds and quickly meet the real, immediate needs of students and families experiencing homelessness.

Through this work, I saw firsthand how impactful the McKinney-Vento program is when districts are adequately supported. Districts used these funds for items that many of us take for granted but that are essential for student safety, dignity, and access to education: Mr. Buddy heaters, tents, sleeping bags, waterproof school bags, food pantry shelving, temporary lodging, temporary utility payments, vehicles to transport students, and even graduation caps and gowns so students could participate fully in milestone moments. These were not extras, they were necessities.

I also saw, very clearly, the limitations of our current system. McKinney-Vento points of contact are some of the most dedicated educators and administrators I have ever worked with. Yet they are rarely funded at a full-time level. Most serve as local liaisons at 0.25 FTE, 0.10 FTE, or as “other duties as assigned,” often while also serving as superintendents or administrators. This makes it nearly impossible for them to give the program, and the students it serves, the time, attention, and care they deserve.

HB 4149 recognizes this reality. It strengthens and codifies responsibilities that many districts already strive to meet, and it ensures that homeless students are immediately enrolled, supported, and protected, regardless of documentation barriers, mobility, or family circumstances. Importantly, it establishes clear expectations, coordination, and accountability at both the district and state level.

With the very real fear that federal protections and funding streams may be reduced or eliminated in the future, codifying these protections in state law is not just prudent, it is necessary. Our most vulnerable students should not lose access to education, stability, or dignity because of shifting federal priorities.

When we design systems that work for the most vulnerable students, everyone benefits. HB 4149 does exactly that, and I urge your strong support.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to Oregon’s students and families.