

*Letter from a single mother in Arizona about importance of the McKinney-Vento Act.*

May 23, 2007

Hello,

My name is Julianna. I am a single parent of 4 children ages 11, 13, 15, and 17 years old. My children attend 3 different schools. I can honestly say that the McKinney-Vento Act has saved the lives of my children and me. If it were not for the McKinney-Vento Act, my children's future might have not been very promising. They might have been living in a home where they would be physically abused, molested, and perhaps even end up in jail for fighting back or running away and living on the streets.

I was in an abusive relationship for 16 years of my 17 year marriage. I experienced all the common fears abused women and mothers suffer. Where would I go? How would I be able to financially provide for my kids? If my own family was not there for me, who could I count on? I was ashamed of my home life, frightened, worried, and not knowing where I could get help.

At first, my thoughts were that as long as my children were safe and not abused, I could survive almost anything, but as time went on and my children grew older, that changed. One day, my husband attacked my oldest son. It was then that I knew I had to act. That was the catalyst that started my homeless journey.

I lived in a nice upper middle class neighborhood, when I suddenly found myself homeless. We left with nothing, no shoes, clothes or even personal ID, yet my children only concerns were—"Don't go back to their dad and please don't change their schools." Due to my children's ages, we did not qualify for a shelter. As fears and anxiety loomed, my children continued requesting that they remain in their schools. School became their secret haven. It was the one place safe and familiar in their already volatile world.

I work in the school system, I did not want my co-workers or any staff members to know my situation, yet when they found out, from my sudden absences, they referred me right away to the District's resource center. Our school's resource center told me about the McKinney-Vento Act. It changed my life. I now had a place where I could get help. With the McKinney-Vento Act even though we were homeless, we could stay in the same schools. Without the McKinney-Vento Act, homeless persons are not allowed to stay in the same school system. The fear of keeping the children not only in school, but transporting them to and from school, were all taken care of under the McKinney-Vento Act.

My children have all thrived and their grades became better than ever. They played sports and participated in outside activities. They had not done so before. They looked for ways to stay out longer and not worry about where they would be sleeping that night.

We remained together and intact as much as possible. My children and I finally arrived in an apartment after 3 months of homelessness safe and intact. No one was molested, no one in juvenile detention, and no one on drugs. I thank the McKinney-Vento Act and all the people who made this happen. Thank you for listening to my story.

Sincerely,  
Julianna