

Testimony of Rumi Khan
Subcommittee for Insurance, Housing, and Community Opportunity
Committee on Financial Services
U.S. House of Representatives
December 15, 2011

Good morning Mrs. Biggert and all the committee. Thank you for holding this hearing so you can learn about homelessness from how we see it as kids.

My name is Rumi Khan and I'm 11 years old. I am in 6th grade at Lamberton Middle School in Carlisle, PA. I'm here with my mother and another family from our shelter, and our friend Diane from HEAR US.

Me and my mom are homeless. We got that way because my dad was abusing me and my mom. When he started drinking alcohol it got worse. He would yell and put both of us down. He hit me and called me stupid and retarded. He tried to choke my mom. We went to court to get help but they didn't help us. We left our home in June last year and went to stay in a hotel for a couple nights. My mom didn't have enough money to stay longer. She tried to find a shelter for us to stay in but they didn't have any room.

One of her friends from work offered to let us stay there with her and her son. It was about an hour drive from where we used to live and where my mom worked. My mom had to drive every day to get to work and keep her job. I had to go with her because she didn't want me staying by myself at her friend's house. I didn't want to stay there either because her friend changed and would get really mean with me. Sometimes she was nice but you never knew when she would smack her son or pull his hair. Once the lady pushed me up the stairs and she was really mad at me. She made me feel down, afraid and not safe. I was really bored hanging around while mom worked. She tried to explain it to me, and I tried to understand. We stayed at this house for about a month. When my mom said something to her about pushing me up the stairs she told my mom to just leave.

My mom was really stressed and she was dealing with a lot of things. When this lady kicked us out we ended up packing our bags and having to walk really far on a hot day to a church to get help because our car had a flat tire and my mom was trying to get it fixed but we were kicked out before she got it fixed.

Another friend that my mom grew up with heard about our situation and invited us to stay with him instead of spending money on a hotel. My mom didn't tell him but we didn't have any money for a hotel or anything. Our car broke down as we were driving across a big bridge. She called her friend and he came to get us with the pastor from his church. It turned out that he had mental problems and he was a big liar. We were really hoping this would work out so my mom could get a job and a place to live, but it didn't.

She tried to get us into the shelter for families that have been abused but we couldn't because of me. They don't allow older boys like me to stay there. My mom kept trying to find a place for us because school was starting soon. We were in one shelter for a little

while but they had a time limit so they moved us into a hotel. It was really scary because drug dealers stood around outside. Sometimes men would knock on our door and when my mom would open it they would just look at us and my mom would try not to say anything to make them mad and tell them they had the wrong door. I made friends at the hotels but it was a small space and I didn't feel at home there. When I went to school the bus would pick me up. I didn't want anyone to know where I was staying. When the bus dropped us off I waited until no one would see me and then I went to the hotel. We were at that scary hotel for a few weeks.

Another friend said she had a spare room we could stay in. My mom didn't know they were having problems and were getting a divorce. They asked her to help out by cleaning houses. But then his wife got mad and we got kicked out again. At least he gave my mom money for her work. So we went and stayed at a motel for one night. It was better not being around all the fighting but we couldn't afford to stay there longer than one night.

We had to change states to find a place to stay. My mom's friend invited us to stay with her until we could find a place. My mom got me into school right away. It was really hard having to start all over again. We were moving around so much so I guess I had to. Staying with other people was tough. It was really hard adjusting to the families' different lifestyles, trying to be around them. It had a big impact. If we crossed the line for some reason, boom, we're out. I didn't want to cross the line because they would take it as disrespect, then, boom, we have to leave. We had to leave there too and stay in another hotel for one night, and then we got into Safe Harbor in Carlisle, PA.

The hardest part was having to move so much and stay in so many different places. We lost everything. It affected my attitude because I lost all my friends over and over again and I was afraid to get close to people because I knew we had to move again.

I struggled in school and came to school very exhausted, because of having to sleep in different places, constantly moving, and not being able to rest. It affected what I could do with my free time. I couldn't do much. When we lived with my dad at least I could see my dog and we had a backyard, but not in a motel. It was very confusing and not much fun. I used to play squash with my dad but now I can't. I miss my dog Rocky.

Everywhere we went it didn't work out no matter how hard we tried. We had a hard time contacting people to help us. My mom's friends couldn't help us. I was really getting stressed too because my mom was looking for a job everywhere and every day and she was so tired and sad. I know my mom was thinking that we should maybe go back to my dad. I missed him a lot but I knew he hadn't gotten any help and I was too afraid that he'd hurt us again. My mom keeps telling me that how my dad treated us was not our fault.

Now we're at least in one place and I don't think we'll get kicked out, at least not just for nothing. I like Safe Harbor but it's still really hard not knowing where we'll end up. We stayed in the room that was on the emergency shelter side for about a month and then we got to move to the other side into our little apartment. I'm not embarrassed any more but it's still hard.

Thanks for listening to what homelessness is like for me and my mom. Moving around and staying with so many different people has been really hard. I hope that now that we're at Safe Harbor we will be able to stay for a while and find a place to live.