March 21, 2014

The Oregon State School Funding Task Force
Oregon Department of Education
255 Capitol Street NE
Salem, OR 97310-0203

Dear Task Force:

Janus Youth Programs operates a variety of programs for high risk adolescents in Oregon. One of our residential programs is Imani House located in Portland and serving boys under custody of DHS. These young men are labeled as “sex offenders” but are in fact sexually and physically abused boys who require a long-term healing process in order to return successfully home and/or to independence. Imani boys attend school at the PPS DARTS high school where they receive individualized instruction which allows them to catch up and maintain their school status while in care.

Imani boys range in age from 13-18, with half of them representing youth of color. They typically come into care well behind in academic achievement and often rejected from traditional public school systems. Yet, the DARTS program offers them a road back to success and to belonging. Working in close coordination with treatment staff, the teachers offer hope to each boy that he can achieve the outcomes he started school with and the reality that with hard work, he can succeed. None of these young men would be accepted into a public school, yet the program has nearly a 100% success rate in terms of youth safely returning home or to an alternative safe living environment. Every graduate from Imani has left with a high school diploma or successfully transitioned back to a public high school. These outcomes would simply NOT BE POSSIBLE without our specialized school.

We are tired of seeing these young men treated as second class citizens in the educational bureaucracy. The current funding formula for their education is capricious, unfair, and inadequate, but there is no union to “stand up” for their rights. We encourage and demand that you become this voice in Oregon for the invisible children who schools are unable to educate. Why should public schools be funded adequately and yet still create a dropout rate of 30% while schools which educate the most difficult children and youth have had virtually no increase in funding? Please act now and act strongly to end this gross inequity and to say for once that in Oregon ALL CHILDREN really are equal and ALL CHILDREN really do deserve an appropriate public education.

Sincerely,

Dennis L. Morrow
Executive Director

DLM: mw