

OSAA and League Officials,

December 18, 2015

As parents of Levi Morris, we are writing on his behalf, requesting a hardship be granted that would allow him to compete in basketball (and any other sport) for the 2015-2016 school year.

Levi is adopted. His birth mom turned 16 the day before he was born, his birth dad was 17. He is African-American, from Miami. We have had a bit of contact with both birth parents, and Levi went with us to meet them in August of 2014. We believe he had- virtually his whole life- imagined this would turn out in some wonderful way, somehow thinking there was this perfect Florida family waiting for us to give him back. The reality was they had both moved on, both married someone else and had families- had kids they had kept, kids they had not put up for adoption. And we came back to Oregon. Diane and I had known this, had prepped Levi for it, but his imagination kept him from believing us. Anyway, that is what we think might have gone on inside him.

Adopted kids normally have Reactive Attachment Disorder, which Levi was diagnosed with several years ago. We have worked to help Levi understand he is loved by us, and loved by God. He has struggled to feel accepted and loved, more readily feeling rejected and judged. Being the only black youth in the all white rural community of Dufur only made it easier to feel different. While he had friends in Dufur, he always wondered how real the friendship was, too often sensing that when any racial issues came up he was somehow victimized.

We had long felt we should find a way to put him around other African-Americans, but had never done anything significant about this. This past June we moved to Portland for this purpose, had him participate in a full month of Urban League (a program in North Portland for black youth, designed to help these youth get started on a promising career path), and enrolled him in Madison High School, well known for its racial diversity. He did meet many black youth, made friends with some, and learned how to socialize with those of his race. However, he also found he was in an environment he was not prepared for, one he struggled with mightily. At Madison he was regularly approached with some drug request, pressured to use marijuana or other drugs. It seemed to him just about everyone there used. He smelled it in the restrooms, on other students, thought kids were high all around him.

The small and, to him, oppressive, atmosphere in Dufur was at least safe, but at Madison he did not feel safe. We think he felt he had to be watching out all the time, that no one had his back, especially after he realized that players on the Madison basketball team were not really in his corner. He thought they would become his friends, but instead, from them he felt disrespect, intimidation, and though he would never use this word, maybe even bullied. He had played with them during summer league and fall ball, but then quit basketball soon after tryouts began in November. Watching how he behaved around them, we believe he never felt he could be Levi around them, choosing to mostly be invisible. We don't have this sorted out properly, but just know that he was not ready for all that being in a large city school meant.

Along the way we had him see a therapist to help with this adjustment. One observation of this counselor was that Levi needed basketball opportunities, as that was the one thing he loved and felt good about. We fully agree with this assessment, and grieved when we saw basketball at Madison was not to be. Levi had earlier told us of his fears and struggles at Madison, and had asked to be able to go to a smaller school. We had begun to look at this. Columbia Christian is close to where we live, and virtually across the street from Multnomah University, where his older brother attends. Diane and I met with the principal and family life director, and liked what we saw. We had Levi do a visit, and he liked it as well, feeling accepted and safe. We made the decision to move him as soon as possible, withdrawing him from Madison December 17th and enrolling him at Columbia Christian Academy December 18th. We are asking that he be granted permission to participate in sports there immediately.

Thank you so much,

Jeff and Diane Morris

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Jeff Morris". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the typed name "Jeff and Diane Morris".