

# Equal Justice Initiative

## 2024 Activity Report



Human Pictures/EJI



Human Pictures/EJI

# Thank you

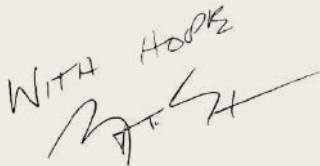
On behalf of the staff of EJI, the hundreds of wrongly convicted or unfairly sentenced people we represent, the hundreds of community groups we work with to promote healthier communities, the thousands of families we serve through our anti-poverty initiative and the hundreds of thousands of people who have visited our sites this year, I want to thank you for your support of EJI.

There is so much work to be done to create more hope, justice and relief for people in this country who struggle, suffer and experience injustice, inequality and abuse. We are committed to doing everything we can to protect basic human rights for the poor, the vulnerable and the imprisoned in America. We are equally committed to confronting our nation's long history of racial injustice and educating and inspiring people to reckon with the burden created by racial bigotry.

This has been a remarkable year at EJI. We have won relief for several condemned prisoners facing execution and we have provided urgently needed health care or food to thousands of people struggling with food insecurity and poverty. We have continued our work to help people leaving prison succeed at re-entry. We educated and provided scholarships to scores of high school students and we've been honored to work with over 200 communities across the country on reckoning with our nation's history of racial injustice.

Close to a half million people have visited our sites in 2024, including our new Freedom Monument Sculpture Park which opened in the Spring. As efforts to limit what students learn about our history of inequality have grown, the importance of our Legacy Sites has never been more urgent.

We are able to do all of the work summarized in this report because of the generous support provided by donors like you. We are honored by your contributions and committed to continuing the fight for racial and economic justice and essential human rights in America. Thank you for standing with us as we prepare to meet new challenges in 2025.



With Hope,

Bryan Stevenson, Executive Director



*Deondra Scott/EJI*

# Addressing Poverty in America



Tens of millions of people in the U.S. experience food insecurity. The American South has the highest official poverty rate in the country, the highest rate of food insecurity, and the least access to health care.

In Alabama, 22% of children are living in poverty. Alabama also consistently ranks in the bottom five states on indicators like infant mortality, overall child well-being, and life expectancy.

EJI remains committed to serving individuals and families experiencing poverty. We expanded our Anti-Poverty Initiative this year, which includes programs that provide high-quality health care to uninsured and vulnerable low-income people in Alabama and that fight food insecurity.

Our Hunger Relief program identifies families in need and provides them with months of direct assistance that they can use to better support themselves and their children.

In the two years since we launched the program, EJI has served more than 5,000 families. Staff interact with families in 56 of Alabama's 67 counties every month, and we have witnessed how additional support has allowed many families to transition to a more stable and secure status.

We have been particularly active in Alabama's Black Belt counties, where nearly one in four residents live in poverty.



Mario Tama/Getty Images



# Providing Hunger Relief

This year, EJL continued to grow our Hunger Relief program to meet the rising need in Alabama.

**To date, EJL has provided over 5,000 families with direct assistance designed to provide hunger relief. This includes nearly 9,500 children and more than 17,000 individuals served.**

Many families that EJL serves live in communities where access to quality food and fresh produce is limited.

To address this problem, in 2024, EJL launched an innovative mobile grocery program that brings quality food items to Alabama families.

EJL's refrigerated van travels to communities across the state and offers high-quality meat, vegetables, and fruit at a low cost.





# The Legacy Sites



Brick House by Simone Leigh at Freedom Monument Sculpture Park. *Human Pictures/EJI*





The Caring Hand by Eva Oertli and Beat Huber at Freedom Monument Sculpture Park.

# Freedom Monument Sculpture Park

In March, we officially opened Freedom Monument Sculpture Park, which takes visitors on a narrative journey through the history of slavery in America and presents world-class sculptures from acclaimed artists. Heralded by The New York Times as a top destination for 2024, the sculpture park animates the humanity and struggle of enslaved Black Americans and celebrates their courage and perseverance.

Freedom Monument Sculpture Park the Legacy Museum, and the National Memorial for Peace and Justice constitute the Legacy Sites, which are designed to be experienced as one journey.

**“The sculptures here—coupled with first-person narratives, historical information, and artifacts like 170-year-old dwellings from cotton plantations and a replica of a train car once used to transport enslaved people to the South—not only tell a story, but also make a powerful case: that the American history we’ve been taught is wrong.” - W Magazine**



Statue of Harriet Tubman outside Freedom Monument Sculpture Park.

**“History, despite its wrenching pain, cannot be unlived, but if faced with courage, need not be lived again.” - Maya Angelou**

On Juneteenth this year, EJI dedicated the National Monument to Freedom at the sculpture park. Standing 43 feet tall and 155 feet wide, the monument honors nearly five million formerly enslaved Black people and their tens of millions of descendants.

Our Legacy Sites have attracted more than two million visitors and have received international acclaim. They are an essential part of our work to advance racial justice and human rights.

We invite everyone to come to the Legacy Sites in Montgomery for an immersive and transformative journey through American history.





In 2024, we installed three commissioned statues at Legacy Plaza to honor civil rights heroes whose activism in Montgomery changed America: Rosa Parks, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and Congressman John Lewis.

The statue of Dr. King is the first full-sized statue honoring him in Montgomery, and the statue of John Lewis is the first life-sized sculpture of him in Alabama, his home state.



In November, the art gallery at the Legacy Museum received a new commission from legendary artist Betye Saar entitled Seeking Secrets of Destiny.



# **Critical Acclaim for the** **Legacy Sites**

**"Freedom Monument Sculpture Park emerges as a beacon of truth and reconciliation."**

*Rolling Stone*

**"A seamless blend of art and history."**

*The  
Guardian*

**"'Bringing people to Alabama': EJI memorials draw millions"**

*AL*  
COM

**"Rich, storied, and nuanced history is beautifully illuminated through multimedia elements that engage all of the senses while touching the heart and mind."**

**EBONY®**

**"The [Legacy] museum lays out with astonishing clarity a history that is painful, but necessary to acknowledge."**

*Los Angeles Times*



Black Renaissance by Rayvenn D'Clark at Freedom Monument Sculpture Park. *Human Pictures/EJI*

# Ending Extreme Punishment and Over-incarceration



*Beth Nakamura/The Oregonian/OregonLive/Pool*





*Jerry-Rainey/Shutterstock*

# Challenging the Death Penalty

The death penalty in America is a flawed, expensive policy, defined by bias and error. Since our founding, EJI has won relief or reduced sentences, or gained freedom, for over 140 clients who were wrongly convicted or sentenced to death. We continue to challenge the death penalty and currently represent dozens of people on Alabama's death row.

This year, we won two death penalty cases by persuading appellate courts that our clients' capital convictions were unconstitutional and that new trials were required. We also won a life sentence for Brett Yeiter, who had previously been sentenced to death.

After winning the appeal of his death sentence, we represented Mr. Yeiter at his resentencing and persuaded the trial judge in his case to impose a life sentence instead of the death penalty.

We have actively supported President Biden's recent decision to commute nearly all of the death sentences of people on the federal death row.

**"The question we need to ask about the death penalty in America is not whether someone deserves to die for a crime. The question is whether we deserve to kill." - Bryan Stevenson**

We also continue to advocate across the country for the abolition of the death penalty. Santa Clara County District Attorney Jeff Rosen, who had previously sought the death penalty in several cases, is now working to take 14 people off California's death row. In an interview published in The Los Angeles Times this April, he said that his visit to EJI's Legacy Sites is what transformed his view of capital punishment.

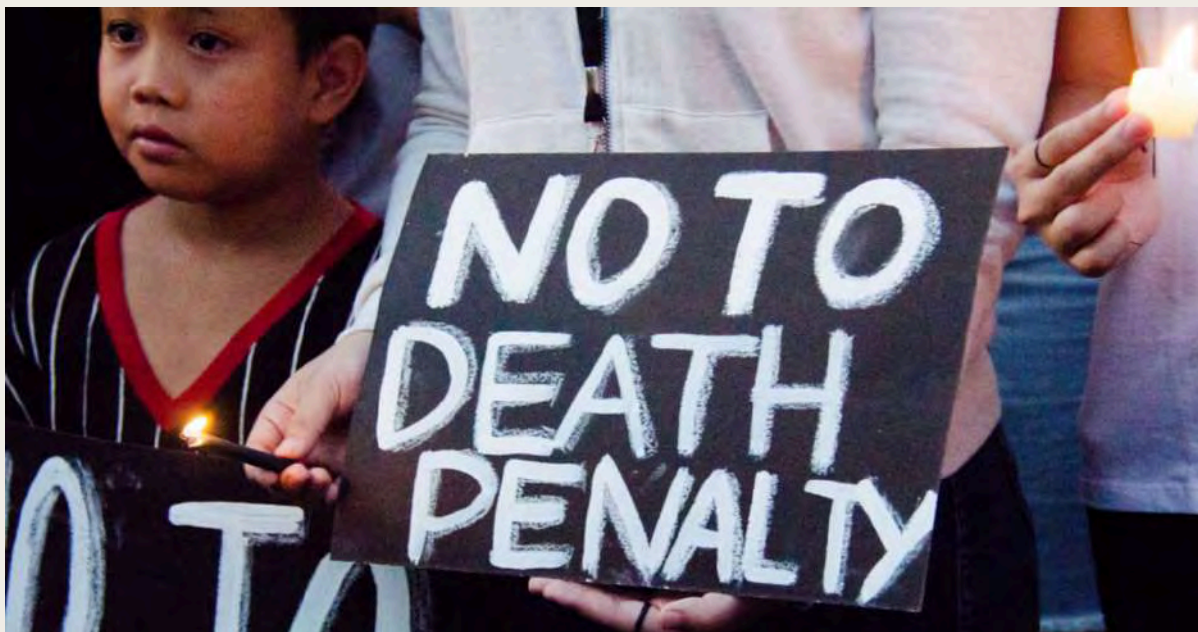
**Overall support for the death penalty has fallen to a five-decade low.**

There have also been recent decisions applying new state laws that bar capital punishment for people with serious mental illness.

Despite public support for capital punishment continuing to decline, Alabama carried out six executions this year. This is the highest number for any U.S. state in 2024.

This includes the execution of Derrick Dearman despite evidence that he suffered from serious mental illness. This also includes the second execution of Kenny Smith, who experienced a tortuous botched execution in 2022.

Alabama is the only state where judges have routinely overridden jury verdicts of life to impose capital punishment, as was the case with Kenny Smith, who received a jury verdict of life without parole.



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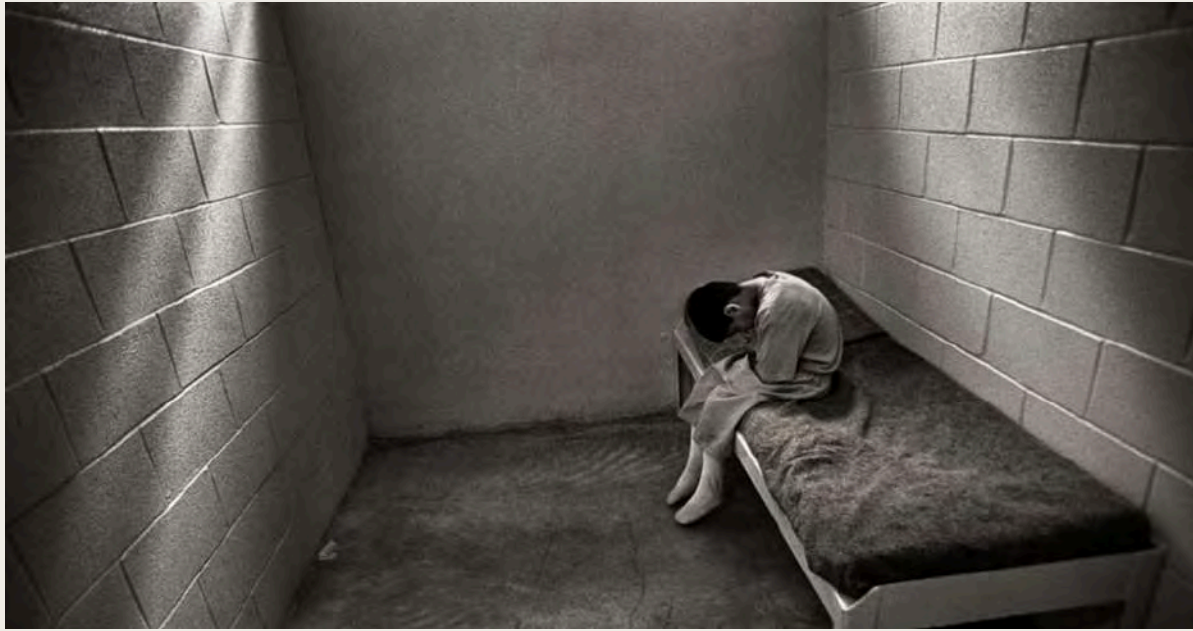
Annie Flanagan

Alabama has the nation's worst record for botched executions, yet in executing Kenny Smith, the State conducted the first execution in the world using the untested, experimental method of nitrogen gas suffocation.

United Nations experts expressed alarm over the use of nitrogen gas, which they described as "an untested method of execution which may subject [the condemned person] to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or even torture."

Alabama consistently has one of the highest execution rates in the U.S. It has executed 78 people since 1983, including twelve people who were executed even though their juries voted for a life sentence.





Steve Liss

# Representing Children in Adult Prisons

Children were executed in the U.S. until 2005, and only in the last decade has the Supreme Court limited death-in-prison sentences for children. Kids as young as eight can still be charged as adults, held in adult jails, and sentenced to extreme sentences in adult prisons.

EJI continues to challenge the cruel and unusual punishment of children prosecuted as adults. We've won major relief for children subjected to mandatory death-in-prison sentences and now close to 1,000 people condemned to die in prison have been released.

Since we began working on behalf of children sentenced to die in prison, 28 states—more than half the country—have banned life-without-parole sentences for juveniles.

**The U.S. is the only country in the world where kids as young as 13 have been sentenced to life imprisonment without the possibility of parole.**



Richard Ross

# Providing Re-entry Support

In 2024, EJI continued to provide re-entry support to clients who were released from prison. This includes assistance with basic things such as getting drivers' licenses, finding places to live, and applying for jobs. We also provide therapy and counseling for clients to help them cope with the trauma of incarceration and to assist in the transition from prison.

Our re-entry program has been a particularly important program for people who entered adult prisons as children and have been incarcerated for years, and as a result, face unique challenges when they are released.



Juan Mejia/EJI

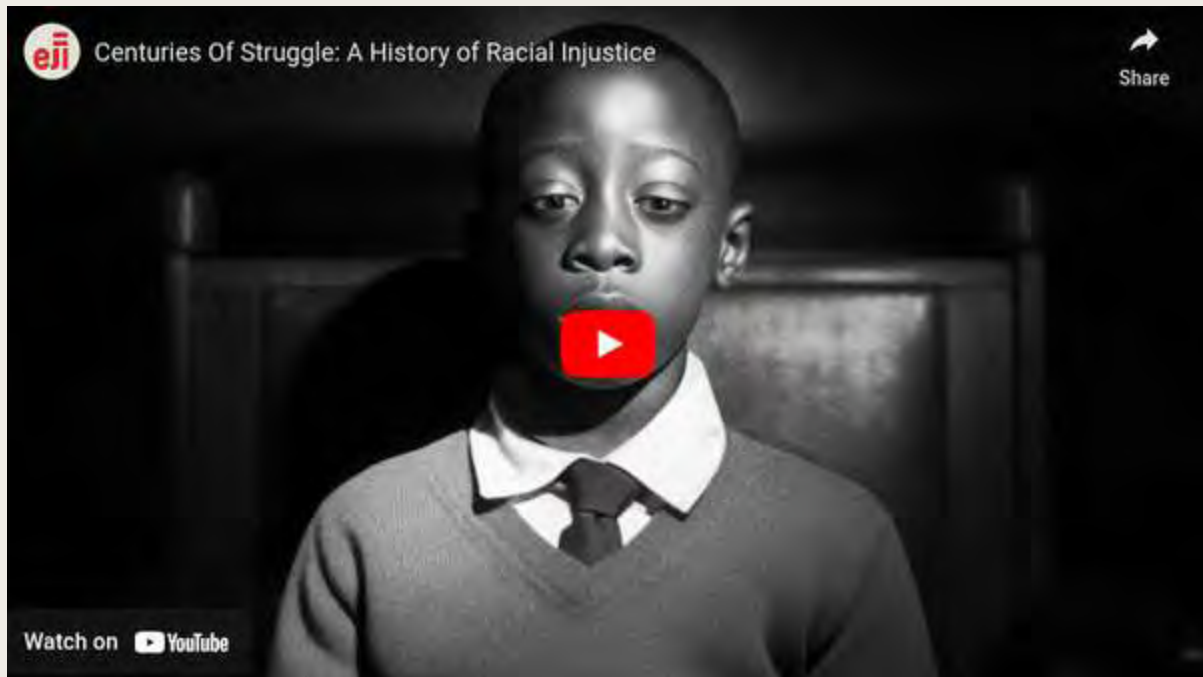
# Public Education



Jeffrey Sabo/Miami University



# Advancing Racial Justice



We are haunted by our history of racial injustice in America. EJI [helps](#) people learn, share, talk, and teach about America's history of racial injustice and its legacy. Throughout the year, we gave presentations and speeches to cultural, educational, and corporate organizations around the world to help people and communities reconcile with our history.

In 2024, we furthered our public education work by adding to our series of long-form investigative [articles](#) and accompanying [short films](#) that tell the stories of significant historical injustices.

[Centuries of Struggle](#) pulls together the entire 10-part film series into one film, bringing to life important stories of injustice that have been largely forgotten.

The special feature series builds on our award-winning [A History of Racial Injustice calendar](#), which highlights events in history with rich detail. Our 13th edition, the 2025 calendar, is available for purchase [here](#). The History of Racial Injustice calendar is also available online and via daily email. Sign up [here](#).



Human Pictures/EJI

# The Community Remembrance Project

Since 2015, EJI's [Community Remembrance Project](#) has supported coalitions across the nation in their efforts to memorialize documented victims of racial violence.

We are currently working with over 200 coalitions across the country and continued this important work in 2024, including in [Newton County, Mississippi](#), [Coronado, California](#), and [Bulloch County, Georgia](#).

As a result of our efforts, more than 100 historical markers have been installed in local communities and hundreds of individuals and groups have collected soil from sites of racial terror lynchings.



To recognize the important work of local communities, we have created an installation at the National Memorial for Peace and Justice that honors the work of community remembrance coalitions around the country. The exhibit includes more than 100 copper replicas of historical markers.



Joel Ortiz

Our Legacy Museum also includes an exhibit of 800 jars of soil collected from lynching sites across the country.

**“In this soil, there is the sweat of the enslaved. In the soil, there is the blood of victims of racial violence and lynching. There are tears in the soil from all those who labored under the indignation and humiliation of segregation. But in the soil there is also the opportunity for new life, a chance to grow something hopeful and healing for the future.” - Bryan Stevenson**



# Holding Convenings to Advance Racial Justice



Matthew Odom

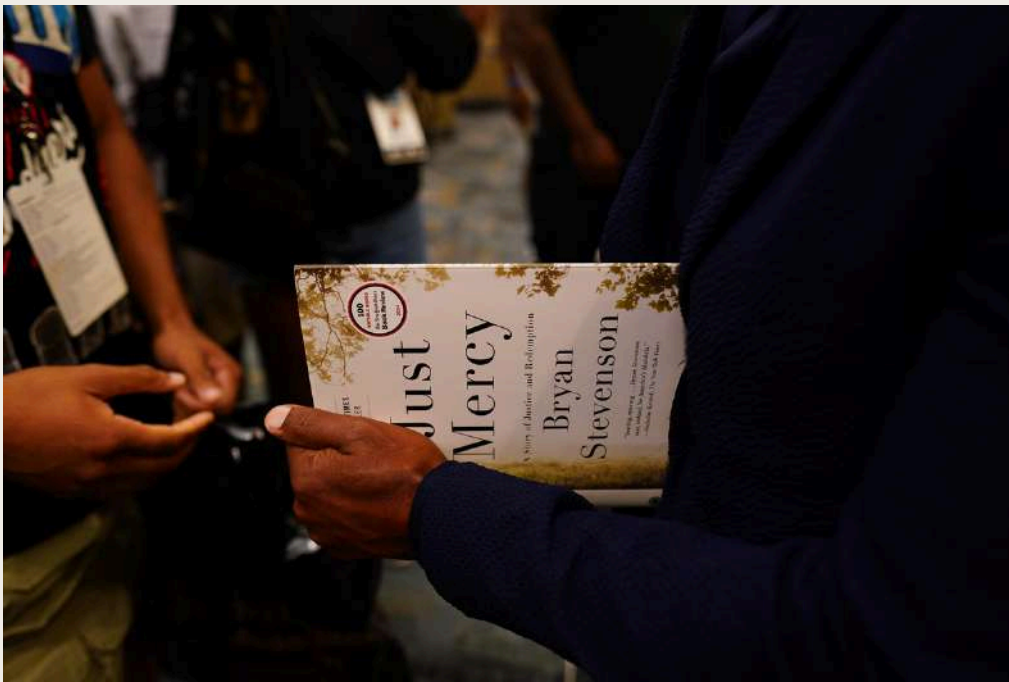


Matthew Odom



In 2024, we gathered thousands of people for convenings at the Legacy Sites to facilitate deeper learning and engagement.

Guests from nonprofit organizations and corporations around the world came together in Montgomery to engage with the history presented at the sites.



# Just Mercy

This year, Random House and One World issued a 10th anniversary edition of our director, Bryan Stevenson's, #1 New York Times bestseller, Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption, a powerful true story about the potential for mercy to redeem us, and a clarion call to fix our broken system of justice. The book has been on the Times bestseller's list for 323 weeks and has been voted one the 100 best books of the 21st century by readers.

Conversations and classes focusing on the book and our work have touched hundreds of thousands of students and community members in the decade since its release. And as Stanford researchers recently found, watching the movie Just Mercy can

create more compassion and empathy toward formerly incarcerated people and support for criminal justice reform.

The 10th anniversary edition includes a new prologue in which Bryan Stevenson recognizes the progress we've seen since Just Mercy was first released in 2014, as well as the continuing challenges still before us.

**Over this last decade, I have come to understand anew that this path requires constant struggle and commitment. What excites me now is to see how many people have joined us on this journey. There are people from all walks of life who feel motivated to embrace compassion and look for the dignity and beauty we all possess."**  
- Bryan Stevenson



# **Challenging Unconstitutional Prison Conditions**





*Joel Albert Cesare/Montgomery Advertiser*

Overcrowding, staffing shortages, and leadership failures continue to fuel the crisis in Alabama's deadly prisons even after federal prosecutors sued the state over its unconstitutional treatment of incarcerated people. Despite Congress having unanimously passed the Prison Rape Elimination Act 20 years ago, sexual violence in Alabama's prisons is at an all-time high.

We continue to document and challenge such conditions in Alabama prisons, where homicides and violence are often hidden from the public and even the families of individuals killed in prison.

At least 12 people have been killed in Alabama prisons this year. Hundreds more have died from preventable causes such as drug overdoses and suicide.

# Supporting Young Scholars



In 2024, EJI continued educational support for disadvantaged communities and youth.

Throughout the year, our Legacy Scholars program, which facilitates the opportunity for thousands of high school students from Title One schools across the country to visit the Legacy Sites, continued to welcome students to Montgomery. Most of the participants would not otherwise have been able to afford to travel to the sites.

In May, we announced 34 winners of the Montgomery Public Schools Legacy Scholarship. The scholarship, which awards \$10,000 to each recipient, is awarded to graduating seniors from each of nine public schools in Montgomery.

The Legacy Scholarship program grew out of a collaboration between EJI and the Montgomery Public Schools as EJI leadership learned more about the financial barriers to higher education that many students face, both in Montgomery and throughout the country.



High school students visiting the Legacy Sites.





WSEA

# Elevation

In December, EJI announced the Elevation Convening Center and Hotel, opening in Spring 2025. Conceptualized by Bryan Stevenson and designed to complement the Legacy Sites, Elevation will provide a transformative space for reflection, education, and connection in Montgomery.

The Convening Center will include a variety of meeting spaces, including classrooms, boardrooms, and a ballroom that can host 200 people. Overnight accommodations will be available in the 99-room hotel, allowing guests and groups visiting the Legacy Sites to extend their experience.

The Legacy Sites experience is a days-long, transformative journey with rich material that prompts reflection and contemplation. Elevation will facilitate that reflection, and provide convening spaces for groups and individuals with a desire to deepen their learning.





# Thank you for your Support

This year, the Muhammad Ali Center awarded our director, Bryan Stevenson, with the Muhammad Ali Humanitarian Award. In November, he was awarded the Moynihan Prize and the Stockholm Prize in Criminology.

EJI continues to receive a perfect score of 100 and four out of four stars from [Charity Navigator](#). We are proud to consistently devote over 95% of our financial support to program and core activities.

In 2024, EJI opened Freedom Monument Sculpture Park, which joins our Legacy Museum and the National Memorial for Peace and Justice to form the Legacy Sites. This year, EJI also made significant investments into new educational spaces for meeting and reflection.

We are grateful to you for your contributions, for joining us in Montgomery to celebrate Juneteenth or visit the Legacy Sites, and for [sharing](#) our work with your family and community. With your help, we will continue the work to end mass incarceration, excessive punishment, and racial injustice in America.

**"Hope is your superpower. Don't let anybody or anything make you hopeless. Hopelessness is the enemy of justice." - Bryan Stevenson**



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[www.eji.org](http://www.eji.org)

[Donate to EJI](#)