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Merck's Ken Frazier Volunteered and Saved a Life

By [Alice Korngold](#)

"I am not going to let him die," [Kenneth C. Frazier](#) [1] insisted to [Bryan Stevenson](#) [2], Founder and Executive Director, [Equal Justice Initiative](#) [3] (EJI) when he met James "Bo" Cochran in an Alabama state penitentiary. Cochran had been sentenced to death for a murder he didn't commit. At that time, Frazier was an attorney with a Philadelphia law firm; he volunteered his time for EJI, as many other attorneys do. After 19 years and 4 months, Cochran walked away a free man. That was ten years ago.

Today, Frazier is Executive Vice President and President, Global Human Health, Merck & Co., Inc. Still head of EJI, Bryan Stevenson also teaches the Capital Defense Clinic at [New York University School of Law](#) [4]. Together with Bo Cochran, they bear witness to injustice, tell the story, and show us how we can take action to support the important work that needs to be done to help create a more fair, rational, and just nation.

EJI, based in Montgomery, Alabama, has provided relief to scores of people who were wrongly convicted or unfairly sentenced. Today, EJI provides legal services to more than 200 people on death row.

EJI also helps the children. EJI has documented 73 cases of 13 and 14 year old children who have been sentenced to life in prison without parole, condemned to die in prison. Some of the children were charged with crimes that do not involve homicide or even injury. Nearly two-thirds are children of color. EJI is now representing many of these children and has recently won the release of Phillip Shaw, who at 28, had spent half of his life in an adult prison.

EJI is expanding its work with plans for major new efforts to challenge poverty in the Deep South. New initiatives include legal training for law students and lawyers, and projects to educate policymakers, community groups, activists, and organizations about problems facing the poor and imprisoned. Stevenson explains that "the opposite of poverty is justice."

Links:

[1] http://www.merck.com/about/executive_committee/kcf.html

[2] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bryan_Stevenson

[3] <http://eji.org/eji/>

[4] <http://www.law.nyu.edu/index.htm>