



POST-RELEASE EDUCATION AND PREPARATION (PREP) PROGRAM

For 20 years, the Equal Justice Initiative has provided legal representation to Alabama indigent prisoners who are facing long-term incarceration or execution. In recent years, as the prison population in Alabama has grown to record levels, the need for services and assistance to incarcerated people has also increased. Re-entry programs have emerged in some areas but none has been developed for 14, 15, and 16-year-old offenders serving long-term sentences. EJI is seeking to address this need by creating the Post-Release Education and Preparation (PREP) program, a long-term supervised release program concentrating on the unique needs of prisoners who entered prison between the ages of 14 and 16.

Juveniles who enter state prison when they are young teenagers encounter extraordinary problems. Their age and life experience make them especially vulnerable to problems in the adult prison system. Because these young men and women have no prior experience in the “free world” as adults, they have fewer life management skills and independent acculturation than most prisoners. The specialized needs of offenders who entered the prison system at a very young age make post-release training and support after long-term incarceration particularly compelling.

PREP will provide extensive post-release education and preparation for this distinct population of offenders.

PREP will provide employment, daily supervision, counseling from licensed mental health professionals, and educational programming for offenders who entered state prison as children. EJI employs a staff of professionals who have agreed to donate time to provide support services for these parolees. EJI also has developed a network of talented professionals, educators, mental health professionals, social workers, and vocational training specialists with expertise in re-entry work who have agreed to volunteer their time and expertise to PREP.

After screening dozens of prisoners who entered prison at 14, 15, and 16 years of age, EJI has identified a small group of people who are approaching parole eligibility, have been in prison for more than 10 years, and have a recent institutional history that demonstrates the necessary motivation to succeed. EJI attorneys have begun working with these young men to prepare for their parole hearings. We plan to begin course work in September 2007 with an initial class of three people who entered prison at the age of 14.