

Montel Snares Ray

James Earl Ray, confessed assassin of civil rights leader the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., has agreed to make a television appearance on the "Montel Williams Show," prison officials said yesterday. Ray suffers from terminal liver disease and could use the show to make an appeal for a donor to prolong his life.

The show is scheduled to be taped tomorrow at the Lois DeBerry Special Needs Center, a maximum-security prison in Nashville, Tenn., where Ray is serving a 99-year sentence for killing King.

A prison department spokeswoman said she did not know what kind of financial arrangement, if any, Ray had made with the talk show. She said the state would issue a disclaimer as part of the show that it was not endorsing the interview. A number of tabloid television shows reportedly had been trying to snare Ray for an interview with various offers.

The interview will come the day after a judge in Nashville holds a hearing into whether the 68-year-old Ray should be given a trial in the King killing — a crime to which he originally confessed but then tried to recant. His lawyers say a trial would prove Ray's contention that he was part of a conspiracy behind the civil rights leader's death in Memphis in 1968.

NEWSDAY, THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 1997