

A plea for King's killer

NEWS WIRE SERVICES

PITTSBURGH — James Earl Ray, the confessed killer of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., needs \$250,000 to improve his chances for receiving a life-saving liver transplant and has raised virtually nothing so far, his lawyer said yesterday.

The money would help the ailing Ray, 69, get on the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center's waiting list for the transplant, said the lawyer, William Pepper. The hospital requires deposits for uninsured transplant patients.

Ray is barred by a judge from leaving Tennessee, where he is serving 99 years in prison for killing King in 1968. The state's two transplant centers have denied him admittance.

Doctors said in August that Ray would die within six months without a new liver.

Ray, who confessed to the murder,

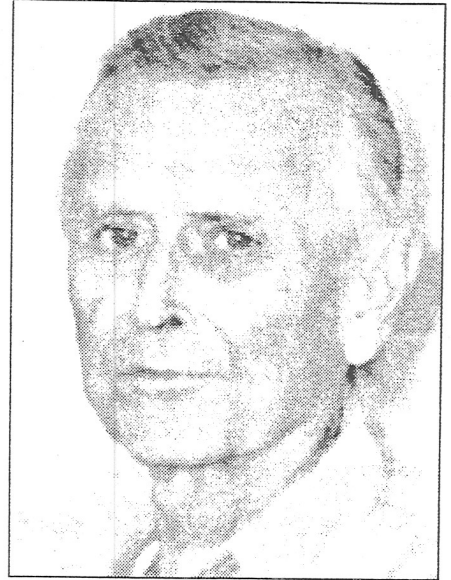
then recanted, is seeking a trial. Courts repeatedly have rebuffed his effort to withdraw his guilty plea.

King's family wants Ray to get the transplant so he is alive to stand trial, but has not donated any money, Pepper said.

"There are numbers of Americans who want Mr. Ray to survive because increasing evidence indicates he is innocent of this crime," Pepper said at a Pittsburgh news conference. "It is felt by many, including the family of the victim, that we may never know the truth" if Ray dies, Pepper said.

The lawyer added that he is not charging Ray and has spent \$1 million of his own money to win him a trial.

Pepper said a friend of King's, the Rev. James Lawson, who was with King when he was assassinated, is raising money for the transplant through the Martin Luther King Truth and Justice Fund.



James Earl Ray