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NASHVILLE, Tenn. AP - Richard C. Ryan, James Earl Ray's new lawyer from Memphis, conferred privately with the prisoner at the state penitentiary Saturday about Ray's attempt to win a new trial for murdering Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Ray, who entered the maximum security section of the prison a day after pleading guilty last March 10, wrote the judge who sentenced him that he wanted the new trial and had hired Ryan to pursue the matter in court.

The letter, written March 26, was not made public until after the judge, W. Preston Battle Jr. of Memphis, died of a heart attack last Monday.

The four surviving Criminal Court judges in Memphis have since named Judge Arthur Faquin Jr. to take over the Ray case. Faquin, who has given no indication when there will be action in the case, signed the order Friday, giving Ryan permission to visit Ray.

Faquin must decide which of two laws takes precedence in the case. One says that someone who pleads guilty gives up his right to appeal or a new trial. Ray told Battle when he was sentenced that he understood this.

The second law says a prisoner must be given a new trial if the presiding judge dies while

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The second law says a prisoner must be given a new trial if the presiding judge dies while a motion for a new trial is pending. Faquin must rule whether Ray's letter to Battle filed with other papers relating to the Ray case constitutes a valid new trial motion.

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