

Embracing our Values



Dear Colleagues,

In the two months I've been at Enviva, I've met many of you and learned about what you do every day to fight climate change, promote sustainable forestry, and build stronger communities. We've talked about some of our plans to secure our position as the global leader in both sustainable biomass and corporate responsibility in renewable energy. I've shared my plans for my role as Vice President of Equity, Inclusion, and Impact, but I haven't really shared why I want to do this work at Enviva, and why this mission is so personal to me.

I grew up partially in Anniston, Alabama, a small town about two hours from our plant under development in Epes. All of my dad's side of the family is from the same house, on Pine Ave in the Snow Creek area of town, which is all Black. Many of the folks in Anniston who had jobs worked at the Chalk Line plant, a lesser-known sports apparel manufacturer. It wasn't Nike or Reebok, but we were proud to wear Chalk Line because we knew the people who made it, and we understood how much love they put into every Crimson Tide tee and Braves cap.

Things got tough when the Chalk Line mill closed in '93. It sat as a brownfield for years, a constant reminder of the industry and opportunities that had been downsized or shipped overseas, and were likely never coming back. A lot of people left Anniston in search of jobs in Huntsville, Birmingham, or Atlanta. And if I'm being honest, those folks never came back either, just like Chalk Line.

But the big show in town was Monsanto, Anniston's primary employer from 1929 to 1971. During this time, they made various agricultural products in our city, most of them containing polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), which they dumped into our water to the tune of about 250 lbs per day. PCBs are known as "brain thieves," which create immediate and persistent cognitive deficits in children, along with various forms of cancer and respiratory diseases. The plant closed in 1971, but Monsanto continued to use Anniston – specifically Snow Creek – as its national PCB dumping ground until 1996.

When I was growing up we knew that this was wrong – heck we could see it was wrong because Snow Creek literally ran red – but we did not have an evolved language on environmental justice to discuss it with powerful decision makers. We thought that dumping was the tolerable downside of having a plant in town and the jobs it provided. And frankly, we thought that it was inevitable and normal that the poisoning would happen on the Black side of town. I spent the bulk of my childhood knowing that this was wrong but not knowing how to address it. And that's why I went to law school. I didn't aim to be an environmental lawyer, but I knew that courtrooms held some key to not only gaining some recovery for what Monsanto did to Anniston, but to preventing this kind of injustice in the future.

But an older lawyer beat me to the case, and I volunteered to help him after my first year of law school. Johnnie Cochran – yup that guy – sued Monsanto and settled with them for almost \$700 Million right before he died in 2005. I helped him during the summer of 2002 and the fall of 2003, as a research intern signing up plaintiffs, taking their statements, and listening to their stories. They all knew me, and they were proud that I was in law school, because they and their kids – my friends – had often not been able to overcome the brain effects of what became one of the most common causes of death recorded in Calhoun County: "acute PCB intoxication in long standing." And while we were glad to get that courtroom victory, the average per plaintiff award of \$7,725 will never come close to making up what we lost. What they took.

Fast forward to today. I've spent the last 20 years of my life, 16 of them as a lawyer, deeply engaged in civil rights struggles throughout the country. From Anniston, to Flint, Michigan and its water crisis, to the state legislature in Missouri, where I represented the proud yet troubled community of Ferguson.



Now I'm at Enviva for two reasons. First, I know environmental racism. I have seen what it does to a community, and I understand how powerless it feels to be systematically and intentionally violated by a company who doesn't care who they hurt. We at Enviva are nothing like that, and I know in my heart that I would not be here if I suspected for one moment that we are doing anything of that nature. In fact I'd be trying to shut us down if we were doing any harm to anyone where we operate. Regardless of what a lazy, false, and anti-industry media narrative has to say, that is not who we are.

Secondly, I'm here because we have a huge opportunity on our hands, and I want to be a part of it. We can change the trajectory of the rural south by making wood pellets safely and efficiently, and by including historically excluded communities in our success. Look at what we are doing in Epes with Mannington Mill; we can resurrect brownfields like the one Chalk Line left in my corner of Anniston. We can show that environmentally responsible, socially just manufacturing exists, in spite of what happened in generations past. We will continue our leadership on environmental justice issues, not simply comply with the lowest bar. We can help disadvantaged communities retain and capture value in the greatest asset remaining in this country, land. And we can beat environmental racism, once and for all. I truly believe that we can do all of this and more in the context of our current operations. I wouldn't be here if I didn't.

One last thing: we must proceed in a spirit of compassion and humility, with extraordinary respect for the communities in our operational footprint. We understand why they are skeptical of industry where they live. Their experiences have been real, and painful. Enviva is different, but it will take time to introduce ourselves and build new relationships.

I've tried to learn what we do at Enviva, and learn about how all of your roles are a part of the big picture. Our plans in our new functionality which I lovingly call "Better South, Better World" are ambitious. I assure you that they are do-able, and that everyone I have met here, from John down, are on board. But now we need you to sign up. I don't have a dedicated team yet, but I have you! If you want to help create equity, inclusion, and impact in the communities we work in, within the context of our operations, drop me a line, and we will find a way to work together.

Yours truly,
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