



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
Executive Office of Public Safety



PAROLE BOARD

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**DECISION**

**IN THE MATTER OF**

**WILLIE JOHNSON**

**W64572**

**TYPE OF HEARING:** Initial Hearing

**DATE OF HEARING:** April 24, 2012

**DATE OF DECISION:** February 19, 2013

**PARTICIPATING BOARD MEMBERS:** Cesar Archilla, Dr. Charlene Bonner, Shelia Dupre, Ina Howard-Hogan, Roger Michel, Lucy Soto-Abbe, Josh Wall

**DECISION OF THE BOARD:** Parole to Interstate Compact for residency in Mississippi after six months in lower security at the Department of Correction. The remaining period of incarceration must be completed without disciplinary incident and in compliance with the Department of Correction's expectations for programs, activities, and employment. The decision is unanimous.

**I. STATEMENT OF THE CASE**

Willie Johnson appeared before the Massachusetts Parole Board for an initial hearing on the life sentence he is currently serving at MCI-Norfolk. Mr. Johnson received this sentence in Hampden Superior Court on May 1, 1998 after pleading guilty to second-degree murder in the beating death of 38-year-old Todd Richardson.

Todd Richardson had an ongoing dispute with Haynie Harris and Willie Johnson, both of whom lived at 513-515 Hancock Street in Springfield. On June 3, 1997, Todd Richardson walked by the Hancock Street house and yelled at the occupants. Willie Johnson, Haynie Harris, and Alex Holmes each picked up an object to use as a weapon and went outside to confront Mr. Richardson. The three men severely beat Mr. Richardson. Willie Johnson, using a board, and Alex Holmes, using a baseball bat, inflicted most of the injuries. Mr. Richardson lapsed into a coma and succumbed to his injuries nine days later. Mr. Richardson died of brain injuries resulting from blunt force trauma to the head.

## **II. PAROLE HEARING ON APRIL 24, 2012**

Willie Johnson apologized for the murder of Todd Richardson and provided information about his background and the events related to the murder. Mr. Johnson grew up in Mississippi as one of nine children. His parents were strict and he had a stable childhood until he started drinking alcohol as a teenager. He dropped out of tenth grade, worked loading trucks, and spent too much time "drinking and hanging out." He moved to Massachusetts in 1980 at age 22. He lived in Springfield and worked steadily, first in maintenance and then as a factory worker. At the time of the murder, he had been unemployed for about one year because the plant that employed him closed. During that year of unemployment, he started supplementing his drinking with crack cocaine use.

According to Mr. Johnson, he had a minor disagreement with Todd Richardson which led Richardson to attack Johnson about one week before the murder. Johnson said his pride was hurt after Richardson "beat me and hit me repeatedly with his fist." On June 3, 1997, Mr. Richardson came by Johnson's apartment house and was "yelling at everyone." Johnson grabbed a board, went across the street to find Richardson, and hit Richardson repeatedly with the board. Alex Holmes followed Johnson and quickly joined the attack using a baseball bat.

Johnson acknowledged the severity of the beating but said he did not intend to kill the victim. He said he felt bad upon learning that Mr. Richardson was going to die, and that led him to "tell the police what happened" when they questioned him on June 10, 1997.

The inmate has only two disciplinary reports; they were received in 2004 and 2005. He has worked steadily since 2000 in the clothing shop. Beginning in 2009, he has completed the Correctional Recovery Academy, Alternatives to Violence (two phases), Jericho Circle, and Emotional Awareness. He attends AA or NA and church services. He has done some work towards his GED.

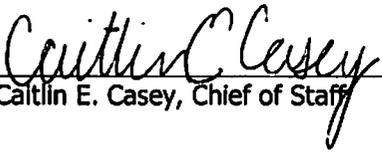
Willie Johnson wants to return to Mississippi where seven of his siblings reside. He would live with two siblings who still live in the family house. Johnson's sister, cousin, and a friend (retired from the Air Force) testified in support of parole. They described Mr. Johnson as a kind and humble person who had worked hard through most of his adult life. Hampden Assistant District Attorney Dianne Dillon appeared and provided information about the case.

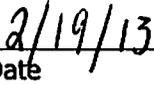
## **III. DECISION**

Rehabilitation for Willie Johnson is less complicated than it is for most other second degree murderers. He had a stable childhood, a steady work history as an adult, no history of violent behavior, and a reputation as a genial person. For approximately one year, however, Mr. Johnson stopped working and abused both alcohol and crack cocaine. His deteriorating conduct and social associations led to his violent actions. Given his history, Mr. Johnson would be expected to do well in prison, and he has. He has worked steadily, maintained good behavior, and completed several rehabilitative programs. After this period of punishment and rehabilitation, Mr. Johnson does not present a current risk for violence. The four goals of sentencing – punishment, deterrence, public protection, and rehabilitation – have been accomplished. Mr. Johnson is unlikely to re-offend if released and his release is compatible with the welfare of society. Parole is granted after six months in lower security, which will assist Mr. Johnson with his transition.

**SPECIAL CONDITIONS:** Parole to Interstate Compact for residence in Mississippi after six months in lower security; the six month period must be completed without disciplinary incident and in compliance with the Department of Correction's expectations for programs, activities, and employment; no drug use; no alcohol use; one-on-one counseling for substance abuse and transition issues; AA or NA twice per week; no contact with victim's family.

*I certify that this is the decision and reasons of the Massachusetts Parole Board regarding the above referenced hearing. This signature does not indicate authorship of the decision.*

  
Caitlin E. Casey, Chief of Staff

  
Date