



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
Executive Office of Public Safety



PAROLE BOARD

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**DECISION**

**IN THE MATTER OF**

**WILLIE ROBINSON**

**W38085**

**TYPE OF HEARING:** Review Hearing

**DATE OF HEARING:** June 4, 2013

**DATE OF DECISION:** November 13, 2013

**PARTICIPATING BOARD MEMBERS:** Cesar Archilla, Charlene Bonner, Tonomey Coleman, Sheila Dupre Ina Howard-Hogan, Lucy Soto-Abbe, Josh Wall

**DECISION OF THE BOARD:** After careful consideration of all relevant facts, including the nature of the underlying offense, institutional record, criminal record, the testimony of the inmate at the hearing, and the views of the public as expressed at the hearing or in written submissions to the Board, we conclude by a unanimous vote that the inmate is not a suitable candidate for parole at this time. Parole is denied with a review in five years.

**I.STATEMENT OF THE CASE**

On the morning of June 23, 1980, Willie Robinson attacked several people with a knife in the emergency room of the Baystate Medical Center in Springfield and in the adjoining parking lot. Five people were wounded in the attack, and a five-year-old boy, Anthony Lombardi, was fatally stabbed.

Mr. Robinson was originally charged with first degree murder. After a jury trial in Hampden Superior Court, on February 27, 1981, Mr. Robinson was convicted of second degree murder. He also received five additional concurrent sentences of eight to ten years for assault and battery by means of a dangerous weapon. Mr. Robinson appealed his convictions and, on November 3, 1982, the Massachusetts Appeals Court affirmed them. *Commonwealth v. Robinson*, 14 Mass. App. Ct. 591 (1982).

Prior to the attacks, Mr. Robinson lived with his wife and two daughters in Springfield. He had been employed until 1975, when he suffered a stroke. He never returned to work. In 1976, he was operated on to alleviate his condition and, thereafter, continued to receive medical attention for high blood pressure and depression. He had been a patient at the Hampden County Medical Center, where he was treated on an out-patient basis for depression following his stroke.

On the day before the attacks, Mr. Robinson's sisters took him to the emergency room of the Baystate Medical Center. His relatives had been concerned about his behavior, which included statements to them that his wife "wants me to kill her." He was seen at approximately 6:15 p.m. by a staff doctor who told him to increase the dosages of Valium and Elavil he was taking and to return in the morning if he was not better. The hospital was unable to reach the psychiatrist who had previously treated Mr. Robinson.

On the morning of June 23, Mr. Robinson was home with his wife and granddaughter. His wife was in the bathroom doing her granddaughter's hair when Mr. Robinson appeared at the door with a bottle of a drain cleaner. He threw the cleaner at his wife, splattering her and his granddaughter. He then took out a boning knife from his back pocket. Ms. Robinson became more frightened and fled into the bedroom. He chased her and stabbed her several times. Ms. Robinson was able to escape the attack, and went to a neighbor's home to call police. Ms. Robinson and her granddaughter were transported to Bay State Medical Center where they were treated for their injuries.

Mr. Robinson then went to the home of his nephew, Rickie Watson. He stated that his wife had thrown acid at him and had injured his eye. Mr. Watson and a friend persuaded Mr. Robinson to seek treatment at Bay State Medical Center and drove him there.

At the Emergency entrance, Mr. Robinson got out of the car and Mr. Watson drove off to find a parking space. Once inside the hospital, Mr. Robinson approached several individuals who were unknown to him, but who were also waiting in the area where Mr. Robinson had entered. One of those individuals was Doris Benoit. He went behind Ms. Benoit and slashed her throat. He then rushed towards Jolene Bernardi, who was there seeking treatment for her eight-year-old son. He pushed her to the floor and stabbed her in the left arm and right side. Mr. Robinson then rushed towards Ms. Bernardi's mother, Mary Santucci, and stabbed her in the stomach.

Rose Lombardi and her five-year-old son were at the hospital to pick up a friend. Ms. Lombardi witnessed the carnage, picked up her son, and ran out to the parking lot with Mr. Robinson in pursuit. Once he caught up to her he began stabbing her while her son was yelling "Mommy, help me." Ms. Lombardi grabbed her son and started towards the ambulance entrance. Anthony stumbled and fell and Mr. Robinson pounced on him and stabbed him in the chest and then in the back.

A security guard, Harold Ferrier, noticed Mr. Robinson with the knife and yelled "drop that knife, you fool." Mr. Robinson headed toward Mr. Ferrier, who was able to hit him twice with his club, but then was stabbed in the back. Mr. Ferrier fell to the ground and he saw Mr. Robinson run back to Anthony Lombardi and cut the child's neck, severing the windpipe, esophagus, left carotid artery, and the right jugular vein.

Sgt. George Bishop, another security guard, came on the scene as Mr. Robinson was crouched over the Anthony. Initially, he thought that Mr. Robinson was trying to administer first aid but, as he got closer, he saw the knife. When he was approached by Sgt. Bishop, Mr. Robinson shouted, "I'm the King, I'm the King." Sgt. Bishop testified at trial that Mr. Robinson said something like: "I was here for treatment last night and you threw me out. Now I've done it, what are you going to do about it?" Sgt. Bishop called for him to drop the knife and, after noticing a name tag on his shirt, he said, "Willie, drop the knife." Mr. Robinson finally dropped the knife and was taken into custody.

Rose Lombardi, Doris Benoit, Jolene Bernardi, Mary Santucci and Harold Ferrier were all admitted to the hospital for treatment. Anthony Lombardi died from the neck wounds inflicted by Mr. Robinson.

After his arrest, Mr. Robinson was admitted to Bridgewater State Hospital for a competency evaluation and a criminal responsibility evaluation. He was found competent to stand trial.

## **II. PAROLE HEARING ON JUNE 4, 2013**

This was Willie Robinson's fifth appearance before the Parole Board. The Parole Board is aware of Mr. Robinson's history of serious mental health issues and the risk to commit another violent act if he is not compliant with treatment.

Mr. Robinson has a documented history of having a stroke in 1975. He was previously viewed as a very hard worker and devoted family man. Following his stroke, however, it appears that Mr. Robinson began a slow but steady decline mentally, and was diagnosed with a depressive neurosis and organic brain syndrome in 1978. He was engaged in treatment until 1980, when he appeared to become increasingly suspicious of his wife and his doctor, whom he thought were conspiring against him. In hindsight, Mr. Robinson appears to have been becoming increasingly paranoid. He sought a psychiatric intervention on the day prior to the offenses and records indicate that his chief complaint was that he intended to kill his wife. He was sent home with medication.

Mr. Robinson reported a vague recollection of the events that occurred prior to committing the offenses. He also provided some details of the precipitants to his actions. It is unclear if he has gained some memory through the course of hearing the details repeatedly or if his recollection is authentic. Mr. Robinson stated that that he remembers that he went to the hospital the day before and was sent home with some medication (which appears to be the antidepressant Elavil). He said he then remembers going back to the hospital and told the Board, "I remember I stabbed some people. I did it because I needed help. I feel bad for what I did. I wouldn't do that now." He stated that he remembers hearing voices to "stab some people." He also recalls throwing drain cleaner at his wife and going to his nephew's house to tell him what had happened. Mr. Robinson informed the Board that he was afraid that his wife was trying to hurt him in some way.

Under direct questioning, Mr. Robinson appeared to struggle to recall specific memories. He appeared to be sincere in his remorse and appreciation for how his actions have devastated so many people. Mr. Robinson insisted that since receiving appropriate mental health care, he has not suffered with any auditory hallucinations, and stated that he believes he is benefitting from mental health treatment. His presentation was consistent with a man who had been on medications for many years in order to treat his psychiatric disorder. He presented as cooperative and respectful yet, given his age, psychiatric history, and probable cognitive limitations, Mr. Robinson was limited in his insight and responses.

Mr. Robinson spent nine years at Bridgewater State Hospital following his conviction. He has been at NCCI-Gardner for the remainder of his incarceration where he has received only one disciplinary report. Mr. Robinson has been compliant with his mental health treatment throughout his incarceration and has been attending a variety of mental health and other programs. Mr. Robinson has also worked during his incarceration. He currently attends some programming and stated that he spends most of his time walking around the yard, reading his Bible, and attending church. Mr. Robinson reported that he feels he is ready to live in society and proposed a plan of moving to Mississippi to reside with family members and work as a janitor. He stated that he would remain compliant with his mental health treatment.

Mr. Robinson had three of his adult daughters present and two spoke in support of his parole. His children stated that it is not an option for Mr. Robinson to reside in Mississippi, and that he would need a residential mental health facility to care for him. Mr. Robinson's family members are not able to provide a place to live or care for him due to their own personal circumstances.

Two members of the Lombardi family spoke in opposition to Mr. Robinson's parole, citing the lifelong trauma that they and others have suffered as a result of his actions. They highlighted the continued effects of the devastating and senseless death of Anthony, who was just five years old. There were also numerous other members of the victims' families who were present for the hearing.

Also speaking in opposition were Springfield Police Commissioner William Fitchet and Hampden County Assistant District Attorney Dianne Dillon. Both Assistant District Attorney Dillon and Commissioner Fitchet described specific details of the offenses and the trauma to the family members and community at large that followed. In addition, approximately 45 letters have been submitted from the public, including a petition containing approximately 2,100 signatures, all stating their opposition to Mr. Robinson's parole.

### **III. DECISION**

Mr. Robinson committed significant acts of violence against innocent individuals who were merely sitting in a hospital waiting room waiting for a loved one or seeking their own medical care. Among his victims, Mr. Robinson fatally stabbed a five-year-old child in the presence of his mother who fought to save him. The Board recognizes that Mr. Robinson was suffering from a mental illness when he committed these offenses and he also was seeking help. The Board also recognizes his positive institutional behavior and compliance with treatment.

Mr. Robinson has been incarcerated for 33 years. He required ongoing commitments to Bridgewater State Hospital for nine years and is currently in a structured and secure environment where he is provided with his medication, which is supervised and administered by the nursing staff. He attends daily mental health groups. Based on Mr. Robinson's current level of functioning, he would require daily supportive care to ensure that his needs were met and to safeguard compliance with mental health treatment. In the absence of treatment compliance, Mr. Robinson is at risk for committing future violent offenses. Neither Mr. Robinson nor his family members were able to provide any type of plan that would provide for all of his needs.

The standard for parole is set out in 120 C.M.R. 300.04, which provides that "Parole Board members shall only grant a parole permit if they are of the opinion that there is a reasonable probability that, if such an offender is released, the offender will live and remain at liberty without violating the law and that release is not incompatible with the welfare of society." Applying that appropriately high standard, the Parole Board concludes, that Mr. Robinson is not currently suitable for parole. Mr. Robinson is encouraged to invest in his continued mental health treatment and to work with his supporters to propose a realistic release plan that would meet his daily living and mental health needs within a supervised setting.

*I certify that this is the decision and reasons of the Massachusetts Parole Board regarding the above referenced hearing. Pursuant to G.L. c. 127, § 130, I further certify that all voting Board Members have reviewed the applicant's entire criminal record. This signature does not indicate authorship of the decision.*

  
Caitlin E. Casey, Chief of Staff

11/13/13  
Date