



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Public Safety



PAROLE BOARD

12 Mercer Road
Natick, Massachusetts 01760

Telephone # (508) 650-4500
Facsimile # (508) 650-4599

Deval L. Patrick
Governor

Timothy P. Murray
Lieutenant Governor

Andrea J. Cabral
Secretary

Josh Wall
Chairman

DECISION

IN THE MATTER OF

**JOLI SPARKMAN
F36723**

TYPE OF HEARING: Initial Hearing

DATE OF HEARING: June 12, 2012

DATE OF DECISION: April 17, 2013

PARTICIPATING BOARD MEMBERS: Cesar Archilla, Dr. Charlene Bonner, Sheila Dupre, Ina Howard-Hogan, Roger Michel, Josh Wall. Lucy Soto-Abbe is recused and did not participate in the case.

DECISION OF THE BOARD: After careful consideration of all relevant facts, including the nature of the underlying offense, institutional record, 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 two years.

I. STATEMENT OF THE CASE

On March 30, 1999 in Hampden Superior Court, Joli M. Sparkman pleaded guilty to second degree murder and was sentenced to life in prison with the possibility of parole at fifteen years. She also pleaded guilty to firearms offenses and received short concurrent sentences that have expired. The victim of this offense was Sherwood Gray, age 31.

Ms. Sparkman had two codefendants. Gerald Cobham pleaded guilty to manslaughter and received a term of 6 to 8 years. He was paroled on July 8, 2003, to an immigration detainer and was deported to Jamaica. His period of parole ended on May 21, 2005 and he was discharged from supervision. Derrick Ellis pleaded guilty to second degree murder and was sentenced to life with the possibility of parole. His initial hearing was scheduled for July 17, 2012. He has an order of deportation to Jamaica.

Ms. Sparkman, Mr. Cobham, and Mr. Ellis were drinking alcohol on the night of August 6, 1997, and into the early hours of the next morning at the Red Lion Cafe in Springfield. Ms. Sparkman was romantically involved with Mr. Cobham; Mr. Ellis and Mr. Cobham are cousins. They decided to rob somebody and Ms. Sparkman suggested they target Sherwood Gray, an acquaintance.

Ms. Sparkman arranged to meet with Mr. Gray, and she drove with him to a planned location while Mr. Cobham and Mr. Ellis followed them. The plan was for Ms. Sparkman to distract Mr. Gray so that Mr. Ellis could approach the car undetected. Mr. Gray, however, noticed Mr. Ellis approaching the car. Upon being noticed, Mr. Ellis fired two shots at close range. Both shots entered Sherwood Gray's upper left back, traveled through his torso, and penetrated several internal organs causing massive hemorrhage.

It was approximately one month later that police arrested Ms. Sparkman and her co-defendants. Ms. Sparkman gave police numerous versions of the events on August 7, 1997.

II. INSTITUTIONAL HISTORY

Joli Sparkman has accrued approximately 21 disciplinary reports over the course of her incarceration; the last two were issued in August 2011. Her disciplinary offenses include disobeying orders, lying, fighting, disruptive conduct, self-mutilation, destroying property, possession of stolen property and possession of contraband. Ms. Sparkman attributes the problems she has had during her incarceration to interpersonal conflicts and poor choices in close relationships with other inmates.

Ms. Sparkman has completed several programs including Correctional Recovery Academy and its Graduate Maintenance Program, Victims of Violence, Domestic Violence Reduction, and Healthy Relationships. In addition, she earned a Bachelor of Liberal Studies from Boston University and a license in cosmetology. She is a member of Sigma Alpha Lambda a National Leadership and Honors Organization. Ms. Sparkman is still active as a peer support mentor, participates in the Lifer Group, works as a clerk in the hairdressing program, as a trainer with the Vet Dog Program, and is also a mentor in the Buddhist groups.

The most recent Department of Correction classification report indicates that Ms. Sparkman has had three suicide attempts: an overdose in January 2000; hanging in January 2003; and an overdose in June 2005. Ms. Sparkman was diagnosed with PTSD, bipolar disorder and traits of borderline personality disorder. She has been a client of mental health services since September 2000 and she has been referred for intensive mental health treatment to the Residential Treatment Unit three times since August 2005. She currently receives one-on-one counseling one to two times per month for symptom management, problem solving, stress support and at times explorative therapy to resolve past trauma. She takes psychiatric medication. An application has been filed for DMH services including a day treatment program for structured support and outpatient referral for medication and counseling.

III. PAROLE HEARING ON JUNE 12, 2012

Joli Sparkman seeks parole to a long term residential program, with participation in mental health day treatment through DMH. She would obtain employment, and attend AA/NA meetings. She would also use her established community network and her family to provide her with emotional and spiritual support. Ms. Sparkman reports a strong support system of family and friends.

Ms. Sparkman was represented by Attorney Pamela Lindmark. At the hearing Ms. Sparkman delivered an opening statement expressing her remorse to the family for her crime and the loss of life. Ms. Sparkman went on to state that she has worked hard to change her behavior. Ms. Sparkman provided the Board with a detailed account of her crime and the path she has taken in her rehabilitation. She also discussed her issues related to mental health, drug addiction, and alcohol abuse.

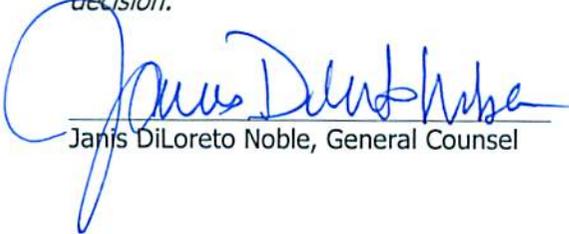
Hampden Assistant District Attorney Dianne Dillon spoke in opposition to parole. Springfield Police Commissioner William Fitchet wrote a letter opposing parole. Members of Sherwood Gray's family submitted letters opposing parole. Five supporters, including Ms. Sparkman's parents spoke, in support of parole.

IV. DECISION

Joli Sparkman appeared for her initial parole hearing after serving fifteen years of a life sentence for felony murder. Because Ms. Sparkman did not shoot Sherwood Gray and did not have an intent to kill him, the four goals of sentencing – punishment, deterrence, public protection, and rehabilitation – can be attained more directly if the inmate is committed and focused on reform. Ms. Sparkman has good program participation, but her conduct does not yet establish the rehabilitative results of the program involvement.

The standard applied in assessing candidates for parole is set out in 120 CMR 300.04, which provides that “[p]arole Board Members shall only grant a parole permit if they are of the opinion that there is a reasonable probability that, if such 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, we find the inmate does not merit parole at this time. In the meantime, Ms. Sparkman should continue with mental health treatment, program participation and pro-social conduct that demonstrates rehabilitation. Her next parole hearing will be in two years.

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.


Janis DiLoreto Noble, General Counsel

4/17/13
Date