



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Public Safety



PAROLE BOARD

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DECISION

IN THE MATTER OF

DOUGLAS COOMBS

W45327

TYPE OF HEARING: Review Hearing

DATE OF HEARING: February 5, 2013

DATE OF DECISION: February 4, 2014

PARTICIPATING BOARD MEMBERS: Cesar Archilla, Dr. Charlene Bonner, 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, the inmate’s testimony 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 August 31, 1981, Douglas Coombs raped a 34-year-old woman who was on her way to work at a store in the Saltonstall Building in downtown Boston. He pleaded guilty on January 18, 1982, and, on January 22, 1982, was sentenced to serve life in prison. Following his guilty plea, Coombs filed a motion for a new trial, which was denied. His subsequent appeal of the denial of that motion was similarly unsuccessful. At the time of the crime, Coombs was serving a 12 year sentence for a 1976 rape and was out in the community on work release.

The victim had been walking up the stairs of the building when Coombs approached her from behind and grabbed her throat. He pulled her between two columns, instructed her not to move or make a sound, and removed her clothing. He anally raped her. When a person walked near the area, he put more pressure on her throat and told her to remain still and quiet. After the passerby had left, Coombs demanded that the victim give him her money. She

complied. Coombs took the money, but then laughed and threw it back at her. He threatened to kill her if she told anyone what had happened and fled the area. After he left, she sought help and was taken to the hospital for medical treatment. Swabs indicated the presence of seminal fluid in her rectum.

The victim also provided the police with a description of her assailant and, the next day, police set up surveillance in the area where she had been attacked. A female plain-clothes police officer stayed in the area while an unmarked police cruiser patrolled the vicinity. A man matching the victim's description of her attacker approached the female police officer. Coombs was arrested. Two days later, the victim positively identified Coombs as her attacker in a photo array.

II. PAROLE HEARING ON FEBRUARY 5, 2013

Douglas Coombs appeared for his third parole hearing. Parole was denied with five-year setbacks after hearings in 2000 and 2005. Coombs has postponed hearings, including this one, several times. Board Members questioned Coombs about the rape that he committed in 1981 for which he is serving a life sentence, the rape that he committed in 1976, his participation in sex offender treatment (SOTP), and the factors in his background which have made him capable of sexually assaulting women.

Coombs explained his first rape conviction, which resulted in a twelve year sentence. He committed that sexual assault in Lawrence in 1976. He testified that, "it was revenge and payback; because of things done to me as a child I felt I had a right to do what I wanted to do; I was drinking and using drugs that morning; I spotted her; I crossed the street and followed her; I grabbed her, forced her down, and made her take her pants off; I got on her and forced myself on her; I was arrested one hour later." Coombs also said, "Her clothes were tight; I thought they were tight." That comment appeared to suggest that his observation contributed to his selection of the victim.

Coombs received parole on that rape sentence and resided at a long-term treatment program in Boston. At the hearing, he acknowledged that the parole was unsuccessful, as he regularly drank alcohol and smoked marijuana and beat his wife. Parole was revoked and he returned to prison. On June 23, 1981, he was transferred to a halfway house in Boston's South End and commuted to Lawrence daily to work in a factory. On the morning of August 31, 1981, he smoked marijuana and drank Jack Daniels in his room at the halfway house before he left for work at 6:00 a.m. He was near the Saltonstall Building in Government Center, walking towards North Station, when he saw the victim. He testified that, "I followed her; I grabbed her; I anally raped her; I threatened to kill her; I took money from her afterwards but I threw the money back at her and laughed." A Board Member asked Coombs how the Department of Correction responded to this crime by a prisoner on a work release. Coombs reported that "DOC changed their policy after this so sex offenders are not allowed to go to minimum security" where they can gain access to the community.

Coombs described childhood events, including incidents of victimization, which made him "a very angry and destructive child; at eight years old I stomped a neighbor's cat to death; I was sent to Danvers State Hospital at 16 when I assaulted my father with a bike chain; I was

depressed and antisocial; I was evaluated as paranoid distrustful and I agree with the evaluation."

Upon conviction, Coombs avoided sex offender treatment for years. He entered treatment in 2007. He testified that "fighting my case is the reason I didn't do SOTP; I was fighting my case for years with legal motions; the last legal motion was in 2003; I fought the case because the crime didn't warrant the life sentence; I thought I should have an 18 to 20 or a 30 to 35; I still had distorted thinking; I thought I didn't kill nobody so why should I do life when I don't have a body." He has not completed SOTP. He participated for five years but was removed from the program due to lack of progress according to schedule. Coombs explained that, "I timed out because they thought I wasn't implementing the behavioral plan fast enough; the plan addressed negativity, hostility, aggression towards women, and lack of intimacy towards men and women; I was not incorporating things quickly enough; in the five years I learned a lot; I know where the anger and hostility come from; it all started when my mom abandoned me; my risk factors are alcohol, drugs, sexually deviant preferences, and hostility to women; it's taken me a long time to admit that I am an alcoholic, drug addict, and sex offender; I timed out of SOTP which means I can reapply in five years." When questioned about his 2005 parole appeal, Coombs admitted that he fabricated an allegation that he was raped in prison by an inmate.

Suffolk Assistant District Attorney Charles Bartoloni submitted a letter opposing parole. Mel Springer, who identified himself as a jazz pianist and author, spoke in support of parole. He said he met Coombs through a prison fellowship program in the 1990s, but has had no contact with him since.

III. DECISION

Douglas Coombs committed this violent rape while he was on work release on a sentence for a violent sexual assault. These two sexual assaults establish him as a very dangerous person in need of intensive and extensive treatment. He did not participate in treatment for the first 25 years of his incarceration. In 2007, he finally began SOTP but did not successfully complete the program. Because he is a serious and violent sex offender who has not completed SOTP, the Board concludes that he is not rehabilitated.

The standard we apply in assessing candidates 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 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 here, it is the unanimous opinion of the Board that Mr. Coombs does not merit parole. The period of review will be five 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.

Josh Wall
Josh Wall, Chairman

February 4, 2014
Date