The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Public Safety

PAROLE BOARD

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DECISION

IN THE MATTER OF

LARON "RONNY" ELLIOT

W62780

TYPE OF HEARING: **Review Hearing**

DATE OF HEARING: **October 16, 2014**

DATE OF DECISION: **January 7, 2015**

PARTICIPATING BOARD MEMBERS: Dr. Charlene Bonner, Tonomey Coleman, Sheila Dupre, Ina Howard-Hogan, Tina Hurley, Lucy Soto-Abbe, Josh Wall.

DECISION OF THE BOARD: After careful consideration of all relevant facts, including the nature of the underlying offense, criminal record, 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 unanimous vote that the inmate is not a suitable candidate for parole. Parole is denied with a review in five years from the date of the hearing.

I. STATEMENT OF THE CASE

On May 30, 1997, a Suffolk County jury convicted Laron Elliot of second degree murder by joint venture. Michael McAfee, the codefendant, was convicted of first degree murder. Elliot was sentenced to life imprisonment. He also received concurrent sentences of 9-10 years for assault with intent to kill and 4-5 years for possession of a firearm. The murder victim was Cassius Love, age 16.

On July 10, 1995, McAfee, Elliot, and three other individuals[1] were involved in a fight at a McDonald's restaurant in Roxbury with a young man named Steve Clinton. Another man named Alvaro Sanders intervened. Later in the day, the violence escalated as Mr. Sanders and another man, Cassius Love, located Elliot and McAfee on Walnut Avenue in Roxbury. After a brief chase, they stopped in front of Elliott's house. Elliott ran inside his house and emerged with a rifle. He raised the rifle and pointed it at Mr. Sanders and Mr. Love, while McAfee

[1] These three individuals have never been identified.

reportedly yelled "lace them." When Elliott did not fire, McAfee grabbed the rifle and shot Mr. Love six times. He fired once at Mr. Sanders as he ran from the scene. Mr. Love collapsed at the scene and was pronounced dead a short time later at Boston City Hospital.

Elliott and McAfee fled the scene. Two days later, after being identified by Mr. Sanders, McAfee was arrested. Elliot had fled the area and stayed in various places evading police. He was arrested two months after the offense.

II. PAROLE HEARING ON OCTOBER 16, 2014

Ronny Elliot appeared for his second parole hearing, after being denied at his initial hearing in 2012 with a two year review date. Elliot is 36 years old and has served 19 years of his life sentence. Since entering the institution, Elliot has completed a significant number of rehabilitative, educational, and vocational programs that enhance reintegration into the community.

Elliot provided a detailed and comprehensive version of the offenses for which he has been convicted. Elliot agrees that if he had not supplied the gun that killed Love, the victim would very likely still be alive. Elliot also presented his understanding as to why he could not shoot Love. He insisted that even though he was entrenched in a lifestyle of drug dealing and crime, he was not a person capable of that degree of physical harm. Elliot explained that while he made a decision to use the gun to threaten people, he also made the decision to not pull the trigger, despite significant and immediate pressure to do so. Elliot described himself as incapable of firing the gun which, despite his criminal behavior, is consistent with the depiction of his character (both at the time of the offense and at present) by his family and the community.

Elliot was admittedly engaged in a lifestyle of selling drugs at a very young age. His family dynamics supported and encouraged his drug dealing, as those around him benefitted and depended upon him to feed their own addiction and improve their financial gain. He was put in the position of being a "mule" to transport drugs around the age of eight. As he progressed in drug dealing, he sporadically attended school and, by all accounts, spent much of his time and money trying to care for his younger siblings.

Elliot made no excuse for his criminal record or for his part in the murder of Cassius Love. He has, however, appeared to gain necessary insight into his history of poor decisions and the pain he has caused others (including the community at large) by developing positive skills while in prison. Elliot has essentially grown up in prison and his testimony, as well as the testimony of others', support a positive progression in his rehabilitation. At various points throughout the hearing, Elliot spoke to the impact that the Restorative Justice program has had, including providing him with a deeper understanding of how his actions affected others. Through his participation in the program, he has had the opportunity to meet several community leaders and volunteers who have positively influenced him since the inception of the program in 2011.

In terms of his disciplinary issues, Elliot admitted that (as he has grown up in prison) developing positive coping skills in a difficult environment has been challenging. Elliot continued to deny his involvement in a conspiracy to bring drugs into the institution in 2007.

He admitted that he was willing to bring walk-man devices into the institution and made phone calls to do so, but denied any knowledge of drugs being part of the arrangement for which he was sentenced to five months of probation to run concurrent with the life sentence. On August 7, 2014, Elliot was issued a disciplinary report for having formed a relationship with a staff member for the purpose of introducing contraband into the institution. Despite his guilty plea and return to higher custody, Elliott adamantly denied coordinating with a staff member for the purpose of introducing contraband into the facility. The Parole Board explored this disciplinary issue at length. Given that Elliott had a similar pattern of behavior and he pled guilty to such conduct, the Parole Board questioned how genuine his level of rehabilitation was. While Elliott asserted his innocence in the hearing, Parole Board members expressed significant concerns with the inconsistencies in his statements and his explanation of what type of contraband was exchanged during the course of the relationship.

Elliot seeks parole, after a period of time in lower security, to reside with his aunt in Cambridge, Maryland through the Interstate Compact. He has been offered employment at a family-owned real estate business. Long-term, he envisions himself working with at-risk youth. He plans to continue to pursue his education and reports a strong support system of family and friends.

Suffolk County Assistant District Attorney Charles Bartoloni submitted a letter opposing Elliot's petition for parole citing, "Since his last parole hearing, it appears that Mr. Elliot has taken the Parole Board's advice and has begun to improve his behavior and do more programming. The Commonwealth concedes that this bodes well for Mr. Elliot being released someday. However, we do feel that Mr. Elliot should continue to show improvement over a longer period of time before he is released." In addition, Boston Police Commissioner William Evans submitted a letter opposing Elliot's petition for parole due to his violent past and documented offenses. Family members, along with a reverend, attended the hearing. Two people spoke in support of Elliot's petition for parole. In closing, Elliot reiterated his suitability for parole.

III. DECISION

Ronny Elliot became attracted to street life at an early age, having been raised in an environment that was readily exposed to guns, drugs, and violence. Since entering the institution, Elliot has consistently increased his participation in rehabilitation, including occupational skill building, education, and treatment for factors related to his criminal history. However, he has continued to make disconcerting decisions within the institution that indicate he has more work to do. The Parole Board is concerned about Elliot's most recent serious disciplinary report that alleges he collaborated with a staff employee to introduce contraband into the institution. Elliot has been involved with a similar pattern of conduct both in the institution and in the community. The Parole Board does not accept Elliot's current explanation for such conduct and questions his level of rehabilitation. The Board is of the opinion that his willingness to violate institutional rules is indicative of continued criminal thinking and remains a source of concern to the Parole Board. The Parole Board highly recommends that Elliot engage in further rehabilitative efforts, as he will need to demonstrate that he is no longer a risk to public safety or a risk for further criminal behavior.

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 Ronny Elliot does not merit parole at this time because he is not rehabilitated. The review will be in five years, during which time Ronny Elliot should commit himself to a more comprehensive rehabilitation that addresses his criminal thinking and lack of candor.

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 Smith, Executive Director

1/7/15
Date