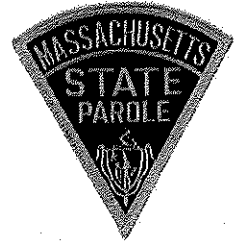


The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Public Safety and Security

PAROLE BOARD

12 Mercer Road
Natick, Massachusetts 01760



Maura T. Healey
Governor

Kimberley Driscoll
Lieutenant Governor

Gina Kwon
Secretary

Telephone: (508)-650-4500

Facsimile: (508)-650-4599

Angelo Gomez, Jr.
Chair

Lian Hogan
Executive Director

RECORD OF DECISION

IN THE MATTER OF

ANGEL RIVERA
W63510

TYPE OF HEARING: Initial Hearing

DATE OF HEARING: June 24, 2025

DATE OF DECISION: January 6, 2026

PARTICIPATING BOARD MEMBERS:¹ Edith J. Alexander, Dr. Charlene Bonner, Tonomey Coleman, Sarah B. Coughlin, James Kelcourse, Rafael Ortiz

VOTE: Parole is granted to Dismas House after 6 months total in lower security.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY: On October 29, 1997, following a jury trial in Hampden Superior Court, Angel Rivera was found guilty of accessory before the fact to murder in the first degree for the death of Juan Cruz Santiago. He was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole.

Mr. Rivera became parole eligible following the Supreme Judicial Court's decision in Commonwealth v. Mattis, 493 Mass. 216 (2024), where the court held that sentencing individuals who were ages 18 through 20 at the time of the offense (emerging adults) to life without the possibility of parole is unconstitutional. As a result of the SJC's decision regarding his first-degree murder conviction, Mr. Rivera was re-sentenced to life with the possibility of parole after 15 years.

On June 24, 2025, Mr. Rivera appeared before the Board for an initial hearing. He was represented by Attorney Michael Waryasz. The Board's decision fully incorporates by reference the entire video recording of Mr. Rivera's June 24, 2025 hearing.

¹ Board Members Coleman and Bonner were not present for the hearing, but both reviewed the video recording of the hearing and the entirety of the file prior to vote.

STATEMENT OF THE CASE: On January 30, 1994, 20-year-old Angel Rivera, in his capacity as president of a Security Threat Group (STG), ordered the killing of 20-year-old Juan Cruz Santiago. Mr. Rivera and Mr. Santiago were both participants at the Westover Job Corps in Chicopee. Immediately prior to his death, Mr. Santiago (also a member of the STG) had refused to kill a Job Corps administrator despite being ordered to do so by Mr. Rivera. When Mr. Santiago failed to perform that "mission," Mr. Rivera announced at an STG meeting (at which Mr. Santiago was not present) that Mr. Santiago would need to be killed. Mr. Rivera later ordered three STG members to persuade Mr. Santiago to leave the Job Corps campus with them in order to kill him. Mr. Rivera gave them a knife with which to accomplish the mission. On the afternoon of January 30, 1994, the three STG members carried out their "mission" by beating and strangling Mr. Santiago in a wooded area near the Job Corps campus and throwing him, still breathing but unconscious, into the Connecticut River.

APPLICABLE STANDARD: Parole "[p]ermits shall be granted only if the Board is of the opinion, after consideration of a risk and needs assessment, that there is a reasonable probability that, if the prisoner is released with appropriate conditions and community supervision, the prisoner will live and remain at liberty without violating the law and that release is not incompatible with the welfare of society." M.G.L. c. 127, § 130. In making this determination, the Board takes into consideration an inmate's institutional behavior, their participation in available work, educational, and treatment programs during the period of incarceration, and whether risk reduction programs could effectively minimize the inmate's risk of recidivism. M.G.L. c. 127, § 130. The Board also considers all relevant facts, including the nature of the underlying offense, the age of the inmate at the time of the offense, the criminal record, the institutional record, the inmate's testimony at the hearing, and the views of the public as expressed at the hearing and/or in written submissions to the Board.

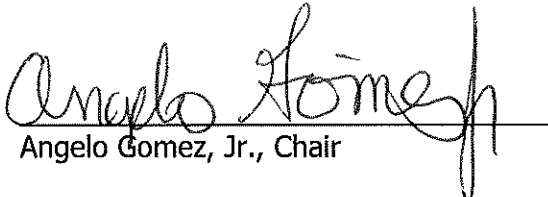
Where a parole candidate was convicted of first-degree murder for a crime committed when he was ages 18 through 20 years old, the Board considers the "unique aspects" of emerging adulthood that distinguish emerging adult offenders from older offenders. Commonwealth v. Mattis, 493 Mass. 216, 238 (2024). Individuals who were emerging adults at the time of the offense must be afforded a "meaningful opportunity to obtain release based on demonstrated maturity and rehabilitation" and the Board evaluates "the circumstances surrounding the commission of the crime, including the age of the offender, together with all relevant information pertaining to the offender's character and actions during the intervening years since conviction." Id. (citing Diatchenko v. District Attorney for the Suffolk Dist., 466 Mass. 655, 674 (2013) (Diatchenko I); Miller v. Alabama, 567 U.S. 460, 471 (2012); Graham v. Florida, 560 U.S. 48, 75 (2010)). Since brain development in emerging adulthood is ongoing, the Board also considers the following factors when evaluating parole candidates who committed the underlying offenses as an emerging adult: 1) a lack of impulse control in emotionally arousing situations; 2) an increased likelihood to engage in risk taking behaviors in pursuit of reward; 3) increased susceptibility to peer influence which makes emerging adults more likely to engage in risky behavior; and 4) an emerging adult's greater capacity for change. See Mattis, 493 Mass. at 225-229.

DECISION OF THE BOARD: This was Mr. Rivera's first appearance before the Board. He has been incarcerated for 29 years. He acknowledged his role in the offense. He began engaging in programming prior to becoming eligible for a hearing under the Mattis decision. Mr. Rivera has participated in the NEADS (National Education for Assistance Dog Services) Program. His renouncement of Security Threat Group (STG) affiliation was accepted by DOC (Department of

Correction) in 1999. He has acquired vocational skills. He has a strong support system to assist with his re-entry needs. In rendering their decision, the Board considered public testimony in support of parole from three friends of Mr. Rivera. The Board also considered testimony in opposition to parole from Hampden County Assistant District Attorney Lee Baker. The Board concludes by unanimous decision that Angel Rivera has demonstrated a level of rehabilitation that would make his release compatible with the welfare of society.

SPECIAL CONDITIONS: Waive work for 2 weeks; Electronic monitoring for 6 months; Must be home between 10PM and 6AM or curfew at Parole Officer's discretion; Supervise for drugs, testing in accordance with Agency policy; Supervise for liquor abstinence, testing in accordance with Agency policy; Report to assigned MA Parole Office on day of release; No contact with victim's family; Must have mental health counseling for adjustment; Long Term Residential Program; Mandatory - May have contact with [2 named individuals]

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.


Angelo Gomez, Jr., Chair

January 6, 2026
Date