

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Public Safety and Security

PAROLE BOARD

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AMENDED RECORD OF DECISION

IN THE MATTER OF

**ANIBAL RODRIGUEZ
W69941**

TYPE OF HEARING: Initial Hearing

DATE OF HEARING: October 30, 2025

DATE OF DECISION: September 4, 2026

PARTICIPATING BOARD MEMBERS: Edith J. Alexander, Dr. Charlene Bonner, Sarah B. Coughlin, Angelo Gomez Jr., James Kelcourse, Rafael Ortiz¹

AMENDED VOTE²: Parole is granted to CRJ or Long-Term Residential Program after 6 months in lower security.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY: On September 21, 2001, following a jury trial in Essex Superior Court, Anibal Rodriguez was convicted of murder in the first-degree for the death of Hector Hernandez. He was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole.

Mr. Rodriguez 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. Rodriguez was re-sentenced to life with the possibility of parole after 15 years.

¹ Board Members Coughlin and Alexander were not present for the hearing but reviewed the video recording of the hearing and the entirety of the file prior to vote.

² This is an amendment to the Parole Board's decision dated March 12, 2026, in which the Board granted release to CRJ or a Long-Term Residential Program after nine months in lower security. On July 24, 2026, Mr. Rodriguez requested the Board reconsider the stepdown period it had imposed in its initial decision. After reviewing Mr. Rodriguez's submission, five of the six Board members agreed to lower his step-down period to six months, for the reasons Mr. Rodriguez had stated in his request. One Board member voted to deny the request.

On October 30, 2025, Mr. Rodriguez appeared before the Board for an initial hearing. He was represented by Attorney Barbara Klein. The Board's decision fully incorporates by reference the entire video recording of Mr. Rodriguez's October 30, 2025, hearing.

STATEMENT OF THE CASE: On October 20, 1998, police began investigating the murder of 22-year-old Hector Hernandez, who was found strangled and stabbed to death inside a vehicle in Methuen. Investigators discovered a bloody latent fingerprint on the driver's side exterior mirror, later identified as belonging to 20-year-old Anibal Rodriguez. A blood-stained wooden-handled knife was also recovered from the vehicle, bearing fingerprints identified as those belonging to Mr. Rodriguez's co-defendant, Richard Molina.

The two co-defendants had been seen together the day before the murder and were both seen entering the vehicle in which Mr. Hernandez's body was found. When questioned, Mr. Rodriguez initially denied any involvement in the murder. He later admitted to his role, claiming his intent was to rob Mr. Hernandez of drugs and money. He and his co-defendant, under the pretense of buying drugs, stabbed Mr. Hernandez and strangled him with an extension cord. Mr. Rodriguez then drove the vehicle to a new location and abandoned it with Mr. Hernandez's body inside.

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.

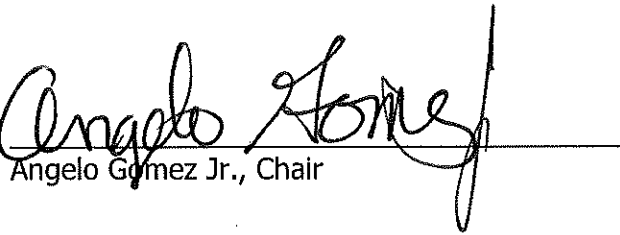
Where a parole candidate was convicted of first-degree murder for a crime committed when he was ages 18 through 20 years old, the Board considers the "unique aspects" of emerging adulthood that distinguish emerging adult offenders from older offenders. Commonwealth v. Mattis, 493 Mass. 216, 238 (2024). 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: Mr. Rodriguez appeared before the Board for an initial hearing after the Supreme Judicial Court's Mattis decision. Mr. Rodriguez has been incarcerated for 27 years. He has maintained his sobriety. The Board considered the evaluation of Dr. Lopez. Mr. Rodriguez was evaluated as low risk for violence and low risk for recidivism. He has engaged in rehabilitative programming. Mr.

Rodriguez has been disciplinary report free for over 10 years. He has gained some occupational skills which will assist with his re-entry. The Board notes that the Department of Correction has indicated Mr. Rodriguez would be a candidate for a minimum-security facility, and the Board finds such a transition would benefit Mr. Rodriguez. The Board considered the testimony of a social worker in support of parole. The Board also considered the testimony of Essex County ADA Erin Bellavia in opposition to parole. The Board concludes that Anibal Rodriguez has demonstrated a level of rehabilitation that would make his release compatible with the welfare of society.

SPECIAL CONDITIONS: Waive work for 2 weeks or program; Must be home between 10 PM and 6 AM or Parole Officer's discretion; Electronic monitoring for 6 months; 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 or CRJ.

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

September 4, 2026
Date