



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Public Safety and Security



PAROLE BOARD

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DECISION

IN THE MATTER OF

BARBARA GOUCHER

F36750

TYPE OF HEARING: Review Hearing

DATE OF HEARING: March 5, 2019

DATE OF DECISION: October 23, 2019

PARTICIPATING BOARD MEMBERS: Dr. Charlene Bonner, Tonomey Coleman, Sheila Dupre, Tina Hurley, Gloriann Moroney, Colette Santa

DECISION OF THE BOARD: After careful consideration of all relevant facts, including the nature of the underlying offense, the age of the inmate at the time of 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 that the inmate is a suitable candidate for parole.¹ Parole is granted to a Long Term Residential Program with special conditions, after 18 months in lower security.

STATEMENT OF THE CASE

On July 16, 1999, in Essex Superior Court, Barbara Goucher pleaded guilty to the second degree murder of 50-year-old Florence Munroe. She was sentenced to life in prison with the possibility of parole.

On February 28, 1998, 33-year-old Barbara Goucher went to the home of Florence Munroe to convince her of providing money for drugs. Several months prior, Ms. Munroe had taken Ms. Goucher into her home in an effort to help her, as Ms. Goucher was homeless and destitute. Ms. Goucher, however, stole from Ms. Munroe on numerous occasions, including the theft of a hand held video game belonging to Ms. Munroe's daughter. Ultimately, Ms. Munroe told Ms. Goucher that she could no longer help and asked her to move out. On February 28,

¹ Two Board Members voted to deny parole with a two year review.

1998, however, Ms. Goucher convinced Ms. Munroe to let her back into her apartment under false pretenses. Ms. Goucher admitted to taking the game and told Ms. Munroe that she would pay her back. When Ms. Goucher requested money in advance, Ms. Munroe refused, and an argument ensued. Ms. Munroe asked Ms. Goucher to leave, but she would not. Ms. Goucher became enraged and then chased Ms. Munroe throughout her apartment, trying to steal her pocketbook. As Ms. Goucher chased Ms. Munroe from room to room, she continuously beat and stabbed her. After inflicting a significant number of injuries, Ms. Goucher suffocated Ms. Munroe by covering her head with a plastic bag and a cushion. She then searched the apartment for valuables and medication. At some point during the evening, Ms. Goucher took off Ms. Munroe's clothes, washed her, and cut some of her hair. Ms. Goucher then left her in the apartment, unclothed.

On March 3, 1998, Ms. Munroe's daughter discovered her mother's body and called for help. After interviewing witnesses, police were led to Ms. Goucher, who provided numerous false statements as to her whereabouts. Witnesses also provided statements that Ms. Goucher had tried to convince others to provide her with an alibi. Police arrested Ms. Goucher on March 4, 1998, and charged her with the murder of Ms. Munroe.

II. PAROLE HEARING ON MARCH 5, 2019

Barbara Goucher, now 54-years-old, appeared before the Parole Board on March 5, 2019. She was represented by Harvard Law Students Samantha Miller and Mingming Feng. Ms. Goucher was denied parole after both her initial hearing in 2013 and her review hearing in 2017. In her opening statement to the Board, Ms. Goucher offered a sincere apology to the family and friends of Ms. Munroe, the community, and her own family. She described how she spent the last two years reflecting on her past, as well as the strides she made in rehabilitation. In discussing the governing offense, Ms. Goucher did not dispute the facts of the crime and continued to express her sincere remorse for her actions resulting in the death of Ms. Munroe. Ms. Goucher explained that she had been fueled by hate, anger, and resentment due to abuse she had suffered and poor choices she had made. Ms. Goucher said that her primary motive was to obtain money to feed her addiction. When Ms. Munroe would not give her money, she acknowledged that she became enraged and brutally attacked her.

Ms. Goucher has been incarcerated at MCI-Framingham since 1998. When Board Members asked about her institutional adjustment since her last hearing, Ms. Goucher discussed how she addressed the causative factors leading to the governing offense. The Pathways and Restorative Justice workshops have helped Ms. Goucher identify her triggers, develop her coping skills, and comprehend the pain and suffering she caused the victim and her family. Ms. Goucher described her participation in the Phoenix Rising program as therapeutic. Ms. Goucher also completed Alcoholics Anonymous Way of Life (AAWOL) – Gavin Foundation and is currently enrolled in Life in Recovery and Restorative Justice Victim Offender Education Group. She attends Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and AA Big Book, as required. There is no indication of substance use in 21 years of incarceration. Ms. Goucher has been consistently employed throughout her incarceration and is a dog handler for the American Vet program. Since her last hearing, Ms. Goucher has maintained a positive deportment and understands and practices non-violent conflict resolution.

Ms. Goucher had several supporters in attendance at her hearing. The Board considered testimony from three friends in support of parole. Several members of Ms. Munroe's family attended the hearing in opposition to parole. The Board also considered testimony from Ms. Munroe's children. Essex County Assistant District Attorney Elin Graydon spoke in opposition to parole and provided a letter of opposition, as well.

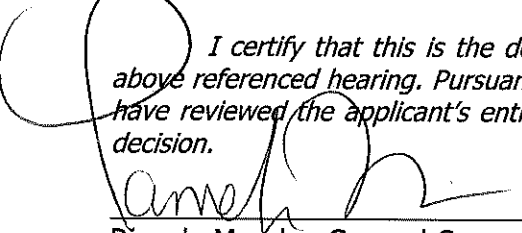
III. DECISION

Ms. Goucher has demonstrated a level rehabilitative progress that would make her release compatible with the welfare of society. She must remain program compliant, coupled with a positive adjustment.

The applicable standard used by the Board to assess a candidate for parole is: "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." 120 C.M.R. 300.04. In forming this opinion, the Board has taken into consideration Ms. Goucher's institutional behavior, as well as her participation in available work, educational, and treatment programs during the period of his incarceration. The Board has also considered a risk and needs assessment and whether risk reduction programs could effectively minimize Ms. Goucher's risk of recidivism. After applying this appropriately high standard to the circumstances of Ms. Goucher's case, the Board is of the unanimous opinion that Barbara Goucher is rehabilitated and, therefore, merits parole at this time. Parole is granted to a Long Term Residential Program with special conditions, after 18 months in lower security.

SPECIAL CONDITIONS: Waive work for LTRP; Must be home between 10:00 pm and 6:00 am; ELMO – electronic monitoring; 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/transition; LTRT for no less than 6 months; AA/NA three times/week; Mandatory obtain sponsor.

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.


Pamela Murphy, General Counsel

10/23/2019
Date