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PAROLE BOARD

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Paul M. Treseler
Chairman

Michael J. Callahan
Executive Director

DECISION

IN THE MATTER OF
BARBARA GOUCHER

F36750

TYPE OF HEARING: **Review Hearing**

DATE OF HEARING: **March 21, 2017**

DATE OF DECISION: **August 30, 2017**

PARTICIPATING BOARD MEMBERS: Paul M. Treseler, Dr. Charlene Bonner, Tonomey Coleman, Sheila Dupre, Tina Hurley, Lucy Soto-Abbe

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 not a suitable candidate for parole. Parole is denied with a review scheduled in two years from the date of the hearing.¹

I. STATEMENT OF THE CASE

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

On February 28, 1998, 33-year-old Barbara Goucher went to the home of Florence Munroe to convince Ms. Munroe to give her money for drugs. [Several months prior, Ms. Munroe had taken Ms. Goucher into her home in an effort to help Ms. Goucher, who was homeless and destitute. Ms. Goucher, however, had stolen from Ms. Munroe on numerous occasions, and had stolen a hand held video game that belonged to Ms. Munroe's daughter. Ms. Munroe ultimately told Ms. Goucher that she could no longer help her and that she had to move out. After convincing Ms. Munroe to let her back into her apartment under false pretenses, Ms. Goucher admitted to taking the game. Ms. Goucher told Ms. Munroe that she

¹ Three Board Members voted to deny parole with a review in two years. Two Board Members voted to reserve Ms. Goucher to a long-term residential treatment program upon completion of 18 months in lower security. One Board Member voted to deny parole with a review in three years.

would be able to pay her back, but she needed money in advance. Ms. Munroe refused to give her any more money, and an argument ensued. Ms. Munroe again asked Ms. Goucher to leave. Ms. Goucher became enraged and chased Ms. Munroe throughout her apartment, trying to steal her pocket book. As she chased Ms. Munroe from room to room, Ms. Goucher continuously beat and stabbed her. After inflicting a significant number of injuries to Ms. Munroe, Ms. Goucher suffocated her by covering her head with a plastic bag and a cushion. Ms. Goucher then searched the apartment for valuables and medication that she knew had been prescribed to Ms. Munroe. At some point during the evening, Ms. Goucher took off Ms. Munroe's clothes, washed her, cut some of her hair, and then left her in the apartment unclothed.

On March 3rd, Ms. Munroe's daughter discovered her mother's body and called for help. After interviewing many 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 21, 2017

Ms. Goucher, now 52-years-old, appeared before the Parole Board for a review hearing on March 21, 2017. She was represented by Harvard Student Attorneys Olivia Warren and Juliana Ratner. Ms. Goucher was denied parole after her initial hearing on March 26, 2013. In her opening statement to the Board, Ms. Goucher expressed her remorse and gave her "sincerest apologies" to Ms. Munroe, Ms. Munroe's family and friends, and the community.

Board Members questioned Ms. Goucher about the events leading up to the murder. Ms. Goucher maintains that she did not go to Ms. Munroe's house on the day of the murder intending to kill her. Ms. Goucher had gotten high several hours earlier and was in a state of withdrawal when she got there. At that time, Ms. Goucher was using 10 to 15 bags of heroin on a "good day." She had gone to the home hoping to get money to support her drug habit. However, Ms. Munroe had already made it clear to Ms. Goucher that she no longer wanted her around, nor would she give her any more money due to her drug addiction. After taking Ms. Munroe's purse, Ms. Goucher armed herself and tried to run out the door with it. A struggle ensued, and Ms. Goucher stated, "I reached in the strainer, took the knife and stabbed her." Ms. Goucher indicated that she stabbed Ms. Munroe three or four times (at that point) in the head and back. Ms. Munroe then ran back into the living room with the purse, and Ms. Goucher ran after her. As the women struggled over the purse, Ms. Goucher stabbed Ms. Munroe repeatedly until she fell to the ground. Ms. Goucher then took some of Ms. Munroe's Klonopin, sat down in a chair, and passed out.

When Ms. Goucher woke up, Ms. Munroe was not moving, so she got a bag and put it over Ms. Munroe's head. She then put Ms. Munroe (who was moving at that point) onto the couch. Ms. Munroe said, "I thought that I had suffocated her. So when I put her on the couch and she was still moving, I put the couch cushion over her head and that's when she quit." Ms. Goucher is not sure how long the whole attack took place, but said that it "couldn't have been more than a few hours." Ms. Goucher was asked if there was anything else that she would like to share with the Board regarding the crime. Ms. Goucher replied, "That...I probably could've stopped and I didn't." A Board Member asked whether she has any more insight into the manner in which she left Ms. Munroe's body. Ms. Goucher replied, "I think I panicked. I think I

knew that...what I did was horrible...in a crazy way thought that no one would know what I did... I had to clean it up so that no one would know..." Regarding the level of violence exhibited that day, Ms. Goucher stated, "....I took everything I ever felt out on one person and for no good reason. For no good reason, to get more drugs, to not feel the pain... I wish I had never become that person that had done that." Ms. Goucher also acknowledged the level of pain that she caused Ms. Munroe's family and friends, as well.

During her incarceration, Ms. Goucher has participated in programming, including Restorative Justice, the NEADS service dog program, and Phoenix Rising, among others. Ms. Goucher credits Restorative Justice with helping her to take accountability and responsibility for her crime. She has been sober since 1998 and participates in Narcotics Anonymous /Alcoholics Anonymous. Ms. Goucher presently works in the flag shop.

Ms. Goucher had multiple supporters present at her parole hearing. One of Ms. Goucher's sons testified in support of parole. A friend (a former City Clerk of Cambridge) also testified in support of parole. Ms. Munroe's son, and two of her daughters, testified in opposition to parole. Essex County Assistant District Attorney Elin Graydon spoke in opposition to parole and submitted a letter of opposition, as well.

III. DECISION

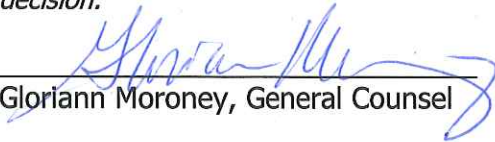
The Board is of the opinion that Barbara Goucher has not yet demonstrated a level of rehabilitative progress that would make her release compatible with the welfare of society. Although progress has been made, the Board believes that a longer period of positive institutional adjustment and programming would be beneficial to Ms. Goucher's rehabilitation. Ms. Goucher committed an extremely violent murder involving a lengthy period of torture. The victim was a benefactor who was trying to help her.

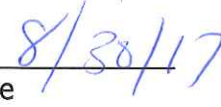
The applicable standard used by the Board to assess a candidate for parole is: "Parole Board Members shall only grant a parole permit if they are of the opinion that there is a reasonable probability that, if such offender is released, the offender will live and remain at liberty without violating the 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 her 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 standard to the circumstances of Ms. Goucher's case, the Board is of the opinion that Ms. Goucher is not yet rehabilitated and, therefore, does not merit parole at this time.

Ms. Goucher's next appearance before the Board will take place in two years from the date of this hearing. During the interim, the Board encourages Ms. Goucher to continue working towards her full rehabilitation.

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.


Gloriann Moroney, General Counsel


Date