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PAROLE BOARD

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Paul M. Treseler
Chairperson

DECISION

IN THE MATTER OF
CARL STROMSNES

W63544

TYPE OF HEARING: Review Hearing
DATE OF HEARING: August 29, 2017
DATE OF DECISION: September 6, 2018

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 by unanimous vote that the inmate is not a suitable candidate for parole. Parole is denied with a review scheduled in five years from the date of the hearing.

I. STATEMENT OF THE CASE

On November 3, 1997, in Suffolk Superior Court, Carl Stromsnes pleaded guilty to the second degree murder of his brother, Eric Stromsnes, and was sentenced to serve life in prison with the possibility of parole. On that same date, he was also convicted of armed robbery and received a concurrent sentence of 10-12 years.

On June 28, 1995, the Chelsea Fire Department and Chelsea police responded to a report of an injured person at 38 Englewood Avenue. All the windows and doors to the apartment were secured, and there were no signs of forced entry from the outside. Lying face down in a pool of blood in the kitchen was 33-year-old Eric Stromsnes. He had a phone cord around his neck and had sustained multiple puncture and blunt force wounds. Near Eric Stromsnes' body was his open wallet on the table, as well as knives, a hammer, and a broken file on the floor. Two neighbors, and a relative who lived nearby, told investigators that they had seen Carl Stromsnes leave the family home around 7:30 p.m. with a red wrench in his back pocket. He appeared intoxicated and carried a duffel bag. According to witnesses, Carl

Stromsnes tried to sell gold jewelry at a bar later that evening. He had two beers at the bar, which he paid for with money spotted with blood. Carl Stromsnes was arrested the following day.

II. PAROLE HEARING ON AUGUST 29, 2017

Carl Stromsnes, now 64-years-old, appeared before the Parole Board on August 29, 2017, for a review hearing and was represented by Attorney Russell Sobelman. Mr. Stromsnes had been denied parole at his initial hearing in 2011. Attorney Sobelman presented an opening statement in which he said that Mr. Stromsnes has always taken responsibility for the murder. Attorney Sobelman indicated that Mr. Stromsnes suffers from a disability stemming from his mental health issues. In the past, Mr. Stromsnes was diagnosed with severe depression, mood disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder, for which he received treatment. Then, after years of being unable to speak about his crime with a counselor, Mr. Stromsnes was able to do so in 2011. Mr. Stromsnes' condition began to improve during his 2016 commitment to Bridgewater State Hospital and, in May of that year, was no longer found to be suffering from mental illness requiring his commitment there. However, in June 2016, he was recommitted to Bridgewater State Hospital for issues triggered by the deteriorating state of his mother. Given his continued mental health issues, Mr. Stromsnes (through counsel) requests a parole to the custody of the Department of Mental Health for treatment.

When Board Members asked Mr. Stromsnes if he believes he has mental health issues, he indicated that he does. The Board noted, however, a 2016 evaluation in which Dr. Charles Carroll of Bridgewater State Hospital opined that Mr. Stromsnes did not have any major mental illness, but rather, had a character disorder, specifically an antisocial personality disorder. The Board expressed concern about Mr. Stromsnes' manipulative and self-injurious behavior when he does not get what he wants, as well as his inability to cope with stress. Board Members noted that if Dr. Carroll's assessment is correct, Mr. Stromsnes may not qualify for Department of Mental Health Services ("DMH"). Attorney Sobelman informed the Board that Mr. Stromsnes has completed "one or two" interviews and believes that DMH is currently evaluating his case, but a determination has not yet been made.

In discussing his family history and childhood, Mr. Stromsnes stated that he is the oldest of five children. He experienced violence in his household and did not have a good relationship with his father. Mr. Stromsnes also reported having a difficult time in school because he was bullied. Mr. Stromsnes said that he has no contact with his family, other than his sister. When asked about his brother, Eric, Mr. Stromsnes indicated that his brother was mentally disabled due to a tumor that deprived his brain of oxygen. Mr. Stromsnes explained that Eric's disability "caused a lot of problems in the family," specifically with his father. His father would drink and blame his mother for his brother's disability. When Eric was bullied in school, Mr. Stromsnes indicated that he would often get into fights to protect him. When Board Members asked Mr. Stromsnes how he reconciles his protective relationship with his brother to that of murdering him, he replied, "I don't know." The Board expressed concern for the brutal nature of the murder, noting that family members had described Eric as "loving, gentle, caring, trusting, [and] mentally vulnerable." It was also noted that Eric had the mental capacity of an eight-year-old child.

On the day of the murder, Mr. Stromsnes reported that he took approximately 10 Valium and Xanax pills. His family was not at home, and his sister had jewelry that he intended to steal. After stealing the jewelry, he went downstairs, where he encountered his brother Eric in the kitchen. When Eric began yelling, Mr. Stromsnes told him to get out of the way. Eric threatened to call police and an altercation ensued. According to records, Eric sustained multiple puncture and blunt force injuries and was strangled by a telephone cord. Mr. Stromsnes also admitted to stealing money from Eric. When asked if Mr. Stromsnes was jealous of the attention that Eric received from his family, he replied, "I don't know, I could have been." In addition, Mr. Stromsnes could not provide the Board with a clear explanation as to why he committed the murder. The Board also expressed concern about a remark made in 2010, in which Mr. Stromsnes stated, "If I met with the Parole Board right now, I'd tell them 'don't let me out; I don't care about parole; it would be the biggest mistake in the world for the Parole Board to let me out; my head is broke.'" Mr. Stromsnes indicated that when he made the statement, he "was confused about a lot of things" and "was trying to come to grips" with the "horrible" crime he committed.

Mr. Stromsnes has accrued approximately 18 disciplinary reports during his incarceration; approximately eight of which occurred since his last hearing. Since 2011, Mr. Stromsnes has completed programs such as Violence Reduction, Residential Treatment Unit Program, Youth Education, and Alcoholic's/Narcotic's Anonymous. However, he is not currently involved in programming. Mr. Stromsnes previously worked in the kitchen and optical shop at the institution. However, he is not currently working.

The Board considered testimony from the victim's nephew, as well as a letter from the victim's sister, both in opposition to parole. Suffolk County Assistant District Attorney Charles Bartoloni provided testimony in opposition to parole, as well.

III. DECISION

The Board is of the opinion that Carl Stromsnes has not demonstrated a level of rehabilitative progress that would make his release compatible with the welfare of society. Mr. Stromsnes is not program involved or employed within the institution. His presentment and deportment are manipulative and concerning. His release does not meet the legal standard.

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 Mr. Stromsnes' institutional behavior, as well as his 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 Mr. Stromsnes' risk of recidivism. After applying this standard to the circumstances of Mr. Stromsnes' case, the Board is of the unanimous opinion that Carl Stromsnes is not yet rehabilitated and, therefore, does not merit parole at this time.

Mr. Stromsnes' next appearance before the Board will take place in five years from the date of this hearing. During the interim, the Board encourages Mr. Stromsnes to continue working towards his 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

9/6/18
Date