

*The Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
Executive Office of Public Safety and Security*



**PAROLE BOARD**

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**RECORD OF DECISION**

**IN THE MATTER OF**

**CHITEARA THOMAS  
F80953**

**TYPE OF HEARING:** Initial Hearing

**DATE OF HEARING:** July 20, 2021

**DATE OF DECISION:** March 9, 2022

**PARTICIPATING BOARD MEMBERS:** Gloriann Moroney, Dr. Charlene Bonner, Tonomey Coleman, Sheila Dupre, Tina Hurley, 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 not a suitable candidate for parole. Parole is denied with a review in two years from the date of the hearing.<sup>1</sup>

**I. STATEMENT OF THE CASE**

On March 1, 2010, after a jury trial in Plymouth Superior Court, Chiteara Thomas was convicted of murder in the first degree, arson of a dwelling house, and 13 counts of attempted murder. On March 10, 2010, Ms. Thomas was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole for the murder conviction and concurrent sentences of 10-15 years on the remaining convictions. Ms. Thomas' convictions on all charges, except arson of a dwelling house, were vacated by order of the Supreme Judicial Court in 2015. On May 13, 2016, after a second jury trial in Plymouth Superior Court, Ms. Thomas was convicted of murder in the second degree and acquitted on each of the attempted murder charges. The arson of a dwelling house conviction was judicially vacated as duplicative. Ms. Thomas was subsequently sentenced to life in prison with the possibility of parole.

<sup>1</sup> Two Board Members voted to parole Ms. Thomas to a Long-Term Residential Program after one year in lower security.

In the early morning hours of July 6, 2006, Chiteara Thomas used a cigarette lighter to set fire to a curtain in the first-floor apartment of a three-story multi-family home on Montello Street in Brockton. The fire spread quickly throughout the home, soon reaching the second and third floors. Numerous residents were home at the time. The residents of the first and second floors were able to escape from the blaze. The second-floor residents threw their children out the window into the arms of good Samaritans waiting below and then jumped themselves, sustaining injuries. Firefighters conducted a rescue of the third-floor occupants. One of the third-floor residents, Olinda Calderon, died from injuries sustained in the fire shortly after removal from the building. Ms. Calderon's one-month-old baby and two other third floor residents survived.

During a police interview on July 7, 2006, Ms. Thomas admitted to setting the fire with a lighter, but stated that her "intentions were never to hurt anybody." She was arrested that same day.

## **II. PAROLE HEARING ON JULY 20, 2021**

Chiteara Thomas, now 37-years-old, appeared before the Parole Board on July 20, 2021, for an initial hearing. She was represented by law student Sarah Blatt-Herold, practicing under the supervision of Attorney Joel Thompson of the Harvard Prison Legal Assistance Project. In her opening statement to the Board, Ms. Thomas expressed remorse for her crime and for the trauma sustained by the survivors of the fire. She is "renewing my mind, changing my thought process, and making the complete turnaround with my behavior and attitude." Ms. Thomas further stated that she feels prepared to make better decisions for herself and the community around her.

When Board Members questioned her as to the governing offense, Ms. Thomas explained that she was in an abusive relationship at the time. She used a variety of substances daily, including alcohol, marijuana, and crack cocaine. She used Klonopin occasionally. Ms. Thomas reported that she had a longstanding, but volatile, friendship with a resident on the first floor of the multi-family home. Ms. Thomas explained that the resident frequently allowed her, as well as her boyfriend, to stay in a spare bedroom in the apartment in exchange for drugs. However, the resident would frequently revoke her offer of hospitality after consuming the drugs, resulting in conflict. Ms. Thomas admitted that she and the resident had physically fought on several occasions, and that she (Ms. Thomas) had broken several of the windows in the first-floor apartment in anger.

On July 5, 2006, Ms. Thomas and the resident had an argument over clothes that the resident had allegedly stolen from her. Ms. Thomas admitted that she was both intoxicated and sleep deprived at the time. Later that evening, when she was outside the residence with her boyfriend, the resident threw a beer bottle at her, but narrowly missed. Ms. Thomas stated that this act enraged her, so she attempted to attack the resident. She was stopped, however, by her boyfriend and another friend. Ms. Thomas stated that she left Montello Street, ingested Klonopin, and then drank alcohol. Although she was "blacking in and out," Ms. Thomas eventually returned to the Montello Street residence. She admitted that she set fire to a curtain in the spare bedroom of the resident's apartment. Ms. Thomas claimed, however, that she blacked out for much of the incident due to her drug and alcohol use. She recalled emerging from her blackout at a friend's home, where someone told her that she had set fire to the residence. Ms. Thomas informed the Board that her intentions were not to hurt or kill anyone in the home. She claimed not to understand the logic motivating her decision to burn the home.

When the Board questioned Ms. Thomas about her institutional adjustment, she acknowledged that her initial adjustment after her conviction for first-degree murder was highly problematic. Ms. Thomas admitted receiving numerous disciplinary reports, several of which involved physical altercations with other inmates. She reported feeling guilt and shame at the time, stating that she felt hopeless due to her life sentence. Ms. Thomas stated that, after her second trial in 2016, when she was re-sentenced to life in prison with the possibility of parole, she began to commit to her rehabilitation. Since her 2016 conviction, she has incurred three disciplinary reports, none of which were for violent infractions.

Ms. Thomas stated that she obtained her GED in 2009 and began to pursue her bachelor's degree at Boston University, where she has completed 31 courses. She expressed a desire to work as a licensed alcohol and drug counselor upon release, stating that she has completed all 10 courses required by the Center for Addiction Studies and Research for certification. Ms. Thomas acknowledged that she still needs 4,000 training hours to attain this license. She has also engaged in cosmetology training and obtained her Serv Safe certification. Ms. Thomas has participated in such programs as the Restorative Justice Program, Emotional Regulation, Working Towards Recovery, and Anger Management. A Board Member pointed out, however, that Ms. Thomas has not participated in any violence reduction programs.

Ms. Thomas stated that she has remained sober throughout her incarceration. She regularly attended Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous meetings when they were available at the institution. Ms. Thomas described her prior substance use as "bondage" and stated that she has no desire to return to that lifestyle. When Board Members questioned her about a drug-related disciplinary report from 2018, Ms. Thomas claimed that she had obtained one Seroquel pill from another inmate to help her sleep. She further reported that she is managing her depression diagnosis.

The Board considered testimony in support of parole from five of Ms. Thomas' family members and friends, including Stacy Borden, Director of New Beginnings Reentry Services. The Board also considered testimony in opposition to parole in the form of a letter submitted by the victim's mother, which was read aloud at the hearing. The Board considered testimony, and a letter, in opposition to parole from Plymouth County Assistant District Attorney Keara Kelley.

### **III. DECISION**

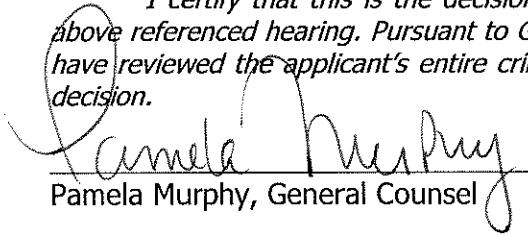
The Board is of the opinion that Chiteara Thomas has not demonstrated a level of rehabilitative progress that would make her release compatible with the welfare of society. Ms. Thomas is serving a life sentence for setting fire to a multifamily home, resulting in the death of 28-year-old Olinda Calderon. Ms. Thomas began working towards her rehabilitation in 2016. Since that time, she appears to have committed to her rehabilitation by engaging in programming. She has also completed all courses for her LADC (Licensed Alcohol and Drug Counselor) and has worked towards obtaining her BA degree. Although progress has been made in recent years, Ms. Thomas needs a longer period of positive adjustment and time to demonstrate that she has benefitted from program involvement.


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. Thomas' 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. Thomas' risk of recidivism. After applying this standard to the circumstances of Ms. Thomas' case, the Board is of the opinion that Chiteara Thomas is not rehabilitated and, therefore, does not merit parole at this time.

Ms. Thomas' next appearance before the Board will take place in two years from the date of this hearing. During the interim, the Board encourages Ms. Thomas to continue working toward 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.*

  
Pamela Murphy, General Counsel

  
Date