



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
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RECORD OF DECISION

IN THE MATTER OF

JABRAI COPNEY
W98501

TYPE OF HEARING: Initial Hearing

DATE OF HEARING: February 12, 2026

DATE OF DECISION: July 16, 2026

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

VOTE: Parole is denied with a review in 2 years from the date of the hearing.²

PROCEDURAL HISTORY: On April 22, 2011, after a jury trial in Middlesex Superior Court, Jabrai Copney was convicted of murder in the first-degree for the death of Justin Cosby. He was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole. On that same date, he received a concurrent sentence of 2 years 6 months to 3 years for possession of a firearm.

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

On February 12, 2026, Mr. Copney appeared before the Board for an initial hearing. He was represented by Attorney Amy Belger. The Board's decision fully incorporates by reference the entire video recording of Mr. Copney's February 12, 2026, hearing.

¹ Board Member Alexander was recused from the hearing and did not participate in the vote.

² Two Board Members voted to grant parole to CRJ.

STATEMENT OF THE CASE: On May 18, 2009, Jabrai Copney (age 20) murdered 21-year-old Justin Cosby, while attempting to steal drugs from him. Between the fall of 2008 and spring of 2009, Mr. Copney was a frequent overnight guest in the Lowell House dormitory room of his girlfriend, a senior at Harvard University. In May 2009, he met Justin Cosby, who regularly sold marijuana to Harvard students. On or about May 17, 2009, Mr. Copney devised a plan to rob Mr. Cosby. He told Mr. Cosby that he was a Harvard student living at Kirkland House and that he wanted to buy three pounds of marijuana. Mr. Copney then arranged to have two friends from New York City bring a gun and help him with the robbery. On May 18, 2009, Mr. Copney arranged to have Mr. Cosby bring the marijuana to a secluded art room in the basement of Kirkland House. When the 3 men arrived in the art room, they pulled out the gun and demanded that Mr. Cosby turn over the marijuana. Mr. Cosby, however, refused to surrender it. When the gun was passed to Mr. Copney, Mr. Cosby fled.

Mr. Copney fired three shots at Mr. Cosby; one bullet struck him, but he continued to run. Mr. Copney and his friends pursued the victim as far as the entrance to the building. Then, they went to Lowell House to meet Mr. Copney's girlfriend, who was waiting with a bag packed for travel. He gave his girlfriend the gun and told her to hide it, which she did. The group then took a cab to South Station, where they boarded a bus to New York City. In the meantime, Justin Cosby collapsed on Dunster Street in Cambridge and was taken by ambulance to a local hospital, where he died from the gunshot wound.

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. Copney made his initial appearance before the Board after approximately 18 years of incarceration. He became parole eligible as a result of the Mattis decision. The Board considered the evaluation of Dr. Long and the application of the Mattis factors as they relate to Mr. Copney. Mr. Copney denied being the shooter for many years. However, he has started making great strides in his accountability and rehabilitation. He has maintained employment. He has begun mentoring youth. The Board is encouraged by the strides in rehabilitation demonstrated by Mr. Copney; however, he has not yet reached a level of rehabilitation where his release is compatible with the welfare of society. The Board considered testimony in support of parole from Attorney Jay Carney, Mr. Copney's sister, and two of Mr. Copney's friends. The Board considered testimony in opposition to parole from several of Mr. Cosby's family members, former Assistant District Attorney David Solet, and Middlesex County Assistant District Attorney Adrienne Lynch.

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

July 16, 2026
Date