The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
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RECORD OF DECISION

IN THE MATTER OF

DENNIS CHAVIS
W81311

TYPE OF HEARING: **Initial Hearing**

DATE OF HEARING: **April 6, 2021**

DATE OF DECISION: **November 9, 2021**

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

I. STATEMENT OF THE CASE

On January 27, 2003, following a trial by jury in Worcester County Superior Court, Dennis Chavis was convicted of the second-degree murder of Sue Ellen Pattiselanno and sentenced to life in prison with the possibility of parole.

On or about May 28, 2001, Dennis Chavis murdered Sue Ellen Pattiselanno in her home in Worcester. Her death was determined to be a result of blunt force trauma to the head, although there were numerous other injuries on her body. Mr. Chavis had been staying with Ms. Pattiselanno in her home for several weeks leading up to the murder. He also had a key to her residence. Upon learning that she may have taken money from him, Mr. Chavis stated to a friend, "I'll get her." Late into the night of May 27, 2001, Ms. Pattiselanno and Mr. Chavis were heard arguing inside her apartment, causing a great deal of noise. Ms. Pattiselanno was overheard stating something like "knock it off, stop, cut it out." She reached out to two

different friends: one by phone, who described her as crying hysterically, and one by paging "911," whom she contacted.

Mr. Chavis, was observed leaving Ms. Pattiselanno's apartment on May 28, and a groaning sound emanated from the apartment, shortly thereafter. Ms. Pattiselanno was discovered deceased in her bed on the evening of May 28, 2001, the victim of a vicious beating. The apartment had been secured with locks, indicating that no intruder had entered the residence. Responding officers noted that there had been an attempt to clean the apartment. Officers recovered a piece of tape with Ms. Pattiselanno's hair, as well as a fingerprint and blood identified as that of Mr. Chavis. Evidence showed that the condition of the victim's mouth, chin, and hair were consistent with tape having been pulled across her skin. When Mr. Chavis was interviewed by the Worcester Police Department on May 29, 2001, he admitted to being present in the apartment the night before. He claimed to have pushed Ms. Pattiselanno off of him, causing her to fall into a wall. Upon his arrest, officers noted scratches on Mr. Chavis' neck, a swollen hand, a cut on his finger, and a scraped knuckle.

II. PAROLE HEARING ON APRIL 6, 2021

Dennis Chavis, now 59-years-old, appeared before the Parole Board on April 6, 2021, for an initial parole hearing. He was not represented by counsel. He had postponed his 2016 initial hearing. In his opening statement to the Board, Mr. Chavis apologized for "anything that's been wrong, done, or said." He claimed that he does not remember much about the case as it was long ago and "it was a blackout." When the Board questioned him as to the governing offense, Mr. Chavis refused to accept responsibility for causing the death of Ms. Pattiselanno. Mr. Chavis stated that, at the time, he used multiple substances, including Klonopin and Valium. Although he admitted to being present at the victim's residence for a party, and that he fought with multiple unnamed individuals that night, Mr. Chavis reiterated that he experienced a blackout at the time and claimed to have no further memory of the evening. In response to a Board Member's question as to whether there was any possibility that he caused Ms. Pettiselanno's death, Mr. Chavis replied, "No, no. I could have been part of the assault, but I don't think I did all that. I was fighting with numerous people over there." He suggested that the multiple witness statements and physical evidence were fabricated. Further, he maintained that a third-party culprit was responsible for the murder.

Mr. Chavis was also questioned about his prior relationships with women. Although he denied that he was physically abusive to prior partners, Mr. Chavis admitted that he may have been verbally and emotionally abusive, claiming drug use had affected his behavior. He disputed the characterization of a prior romantic relationship as "difficult" and minimized the existence of several abuse-prevention orders obtained against him. Upon Board Member questioning, Mr. Chavis admitted to struggling with substance abuse prior to his incarceration. However, he stated that he attends AA/NA meetings. Nonetheless, the Board noted that Mr. Chavis has incurred numerous disciplinary reports related to substance abuse in the institution. At the hearing, Mr. Chavis took no responsibility for the more serious of these reports, which involved the import of controlled substances into the institution. He claimed not to remember others, characterizing many of his disciplinary reports as "frivolous."

Mr. Chavis has completed limited programming. He stated that he completed Criminal Thinking and Expansion of Criminal Thinking in 2018. Mr. Chavis indicated that he is currently enrolled in Adult Basic Education and obtained his GED. Upon questioning by the Board, he expressed no interest in participating in the Correctional Recovery Academy.

The Board considered testimony from two members of Ms. Pattiselanno's family in opposition to parole. The Board also considered the testimony and letter of Worcester County Assistant District Attorney Michelle King in opposition to parole.

III. DECISION

The Board is of the opinion that Dennis Chavis has not demonstrated a level of rehabilitative progress that would make his release compatible with the welfare of society. Mr. Chavis beat and murdered Sue Ellen Pattiselanno. Mr. Chavis has a lengthy criminal history. He presented poorly and has a history of violence against woman. He minimized the crime and showed a profound lack of empathy for the victim and the victim's family. He has had a poor institutional adjustment as evidenced by his numerous disciplinary reports. Mr. Chavis is encouraged to engage in rehabilitative programming and improved institutional adjustment. As recently as 2020, Mr. Chavis received a disciplinary report for home brew.

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. Chavis' 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. Chavis's risk of recidivism. After applying this standard to the circumstances of Mr. Chavis's case, the Board is of the opinion that Dennis Chavis is not rehabilitated and, therefore, does not merit parole at this time.

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

Pamela Murphy, General Counsel

11/9/2021
Date