



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



**PAROLE BOARD**

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**RECORD OF DECISION**

**IN THE MATTER OF**

**JAMES BOONE**  
**W37819**

**TYPE OF HEARING:** Review Hearing

**DATE OF HEARING:** July 22, 2025

**DATE OF DECISION:** January 22, 2026

**PARTICIPATING BOARD MEMBERS:** Sarah B. Coughlin, Angelo Gomez Jr., James Kelcourse, Rafael Ortiz<sup>1</sup>

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

**PROCEDURAL HISTORY:** On September 5, 1980, in Essex Superior Court, James Boone pleaded guilty to murder in the second-degree for the death of Shirley Jennings and her three children. He was sentenced to four concurrent sentences of life in prison with the possibility of parole. He also received a 15 to 20 year sentence, to be served concurrently with the life sentences, for arson of a dwelling. His arson sentence is now considered expired. Parole was denied following an initial hearing in 1999, and after review hearings in 2003, 2008, 2013, 2018, 2022.<sup>2</sup>

On July 22, 2025, Mr. Boone appeared before the Board for a review hearing. He was represented by Attorney Melissa Celli.

**STATEMENT OF THE CASE:** James Boone (age 20) intentionally set fire to an occupied, 11 unit residential building on the evening of March 11, 1980. Eight units were occupied. When Mr. Boone set the fire, he knew people were inside the building. Shirley Jennings (age 23) and her

<sup>1</sup> Board Members Alexander and Bonner were not present at the hearing. The Chair deemed Board Members Alexander and Bonner unavailable for the vote on this matter because, due to a malfunction in the Board's audio equipment, they were unable to review the full recording of the public hearing. Former Acting Chair Coleman was present during the hearing but departed the Board prior to the vote.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Boone postponed his review hearing scheduled in 2023.

three young children perished in the fire. Mr. Boone initially told police that he set the fire accidentally. He then confessed to setting the fire intentionally in an attempted suicide.

**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.

**DECISION OF THE BOARD:** Mr. Boone appeared before the Board for the 7th time. Mr. Boone has disciplinary reports for substance use (K2) as recently as June 29, 2025. The Board also notes he had another substance use disciplinary report in August 2025 (post-hearing). He incurred a total of five disciplinary reports since his last hearing in 2022, four of them were substance use related. On one of those occasions, in March 2025, he had to be revived with the use of Narcan. Mr. Boone is encouraged to engage in rehabilitative programming, attend AA, and remain D-Report free. As to the nature and circumstances of the offense, Mr. Boone took the lives of four people – a mother and her three minor children – and he is still exhibiting many of the same concerning characteristics that were present at the time of the governing offense. The Board finds that Mr. Boone poses a high risk of recidivism. With respect to Mr. Boone’s likelihood of recidivism, the Board considered Mr. Boone’s score on the LS/CMI risk assessment, which revealed that Mr. Boone poses a high risk of recidivism. The Board also considered the report by Dr. Kelly Casey, who conducted a neuro-psychological evaluation of Mr. Boone.

The Board heard testimony in support of parole from Dr. Kelly Casey, a licensed clinical social worker, and Attorney Lisa Newman-Polk. The Board heard testimony in opposition to parole from two of the victims’ family members, as well as Essex County Assistant District Attorney Zachary Grube. Given Mr. Boone’s high risk of recidivism, the nature and circumstances of the offense, and Mr. Boone’s ongoing disciplinary issues, the Board unanimously concludes that he has not demonstrated a level of rehabilitation that would make his release compatible with the welfare of society.

*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

January 22, 2026  
Date