



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



PAROLE BOARD

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AMENDED RECORD OF DECISION

IN THE MATTER OF

JEFFREY TASSE

W46453

TYPE OF HEARING: **Review Hearing**

DATE OF HEARING: **January 15, 2019**

DATE OF DECISION: **March 1, 2021**

PARTICIPATING BOARD MEMBERS: Dr. Charlene Bonner, Tonomey Coleman, Sheila Dupre, Tina Hurley, Colette Santa¹

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 a suitable candidate for parole. Parole is granted to Jeffrey Tasse's from and after 15 to 20 year sentence for manslaughter with special conditions.

I. STATEMENT OF THE CASE

On May 9, 1989, in Worcester Superior Court, Jeffrey Tasse pleaded guilty to the second degree murder of Lisa Cosenza and was sentenced to life in prison with the possibility of parole. On that same date, he also pleaded guilty to manslaughter in the death of Mitchell Burke and received a 15 to 20 year consecutive sentence.

On September 4, 1988, Mr. Tasse, his girlfriend Ms. Cosenza, and Mr. Tasse's two roommates (one of whom was Mr. Burke) attended a party together in Worcester. At some point, Mr. Tasse left the party to go to a bar. When he did not return to the party, his companions went

¹ Chair Moroney and Karen McCarthy abstained from the vote, as they were not Board Members at the time of the hearing. Board Member Santa was absent from the hearing but participated in the vote.

back to his apartment to wait for him. When Mr. Tasse returned home, he and Ms. Cosenza engaged in an argument that resulted in Mr. Tasse striking Ms. Cosenza. When Mr. Burke came to the aid of Ms. Cosenza, a physical confrontation between the men ensued, during which they fell down the stairs. Mr. Tasse then retrieved a semi-automatic assault rifle from his bedroom and pointed the rifle at Mr. Burke. When Mr. Burke moved toward Mr. Tasse (as if to take the gun away), Mr. Tasse fired the gun, striking Mr. Burke four times in the chest. Mr. Tasse then shot Ms. Cosenza, striking her once in the abdomen. Mr. Burke and Ms. Cosenza both succumbed to their injuries.

II. PAROLE HEARING ON JANUARY 15, 2019

Jeffrey Tasse, now 51-years-old, appeared before the Parole Board for his review hearing on January 15, 2019. He was not represented by counsel. Mr. Tasse had been denied parole after both his initial hearing in 2003 and his review hearing in 2009. Mr. Tasse postponed his 2014 review hearing. In his opening statement to the Board, Mr. Tasse acknowledged his responsibility for the pain and suffering he has caused the family and friends of both Ms. Cosenza and Mr. Burke. He stated that at the time of the crime, he was a "mentally, emotionally, and spiritually bankrupt person." In discussing the governing offense with Board Members, Mr. Tasse explained that he was a "miserable person," who did not treat others well. He stated that he was motivated by feelings of jealousy, anger, and shame when he committed the killings. He admitted that he had refused to address his issues, and instead, blamed Ms. Cosenza and Mr. Burke. He told the Board that retrieving the gun from his bedroom that evening was "the stupidest thing [he has] ever done." Mr. Tasse acknowledged that Mr. Burke was defending Ms. Cosenza from his abusive behavior on the night of the crime.

The Board discussed Mr. Tasse's institutional adjustment since his last hearing. Mr. Tasse is currently employed as a janitor and has engaged in significant programming. Mr. Tasse credits small groups, as well as Anger Management, Correctional Recovery Academy, Alternatives to Violence, and Jericho Circle with the "monumental" change in his thinking and outlook on life. Above all, Mr. Tasse places his 21 years of sobriety as "first and foremost" in his ongoing rehabilitation.

Mr. Tasse had several supporters in attendance at his hearing. The sister of Ms. Cosenza spoke in opposition to parole. Worcester County Assistant District Attorney Michelle King submitted a letter and testified in opposition to parole.

III. DECISION

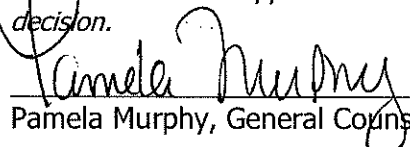
On January 19, 2021, the Supreme Judicial Court in William Dinkins & Another v. Massachusetts Parole Board, 486 Mass. 605 (2021) invalidated 120 Code Mass. Regs. § 200.08(3)(c) and held that the Board must aggregate the parole ineligibility period of a life sentence with the parole ineligibility period of consecutive sentences for purposes of determining a single parole ineligibility date. In accordance with the SJC ruling, Mr. Tasse's parole eligibility was recalculated in order to determine a single parole eligibility date. The Board subsequently re-reviewed Mr. Tasse's case and amended its original decision paroling Mr. Tasse to his consecutive sentence and, 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, parole is granted to CRJ-Transitional Housing: Brook House, but not before 24 months in lower security.² Mr. Tasse has served approximately 32 years for the murders of 19-year-old Lisa Cosenza and 22-year-old Mitchell Burke in Worcester. Mr. Tasse's release after a gradual transition meets the legal standard. Mr. Tasse needs to demonstrate that he can be successful in a lesser restrictive environment.

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." In forming this opinion, the Board has taken into consideration Mr. Tasse's 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. Tasse's risk of recidivism. After applying this appropriately high standard to the circumstances of Mr. Tasse's case, the Board is of the opinion that Mr. Tasse is rehabilitated and merits parole at this time.

Special Conditions: Reserve to CRJ-Transitional Housing: Brooke House, but not before 24 months in lower security; Waive work for two weeks; Must be at home between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m.; ELMO-electronic monitoring; Supervise for drugs; testing in accordance with agency policy; Supervise for liquor abstinence; testing in accordance with agency policy; Report to assigned MA Parole Office on day of release; No contact with victim's family; Must have substance abuse evaluation and adhere to plan; Must have mental health counseling for adjustment and transition.

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

3/1/2021
Date

² The decision was unanimous.