

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Public Safety and Security

PAROLE BOARD

12 Mercer Road
Natick, Massachusetts 01760



Maura T. Healey
Governor

Kimberley Driscoll
Lieutenant Governor

Terrence M. Reidy
Secretary

Telephone: (508)-650-4500

Facsimile: (508)-650-4599

Tina M. Hurley
Chair

Lian Hogan
Executive Director

RECORD OF DECISION

IN THE MATTER OF

JOEL VASQUEZ
W99654

TYPE OF HEARING: Initial Hearing¹

DATE OF HEARING: December 19, 2024

DATE OF DECISION: April 7, 2025

PARTICIPATING BOARD MEMBERS: Edith J. Alexander, Dr. Charlene Bonner, Tonomey Coleman, Sarah B. Coughlin, Tina M. Hurley, James Kelcourse, Rafael Ortiz

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

PROCEDURAL HISTORY: On December 4, 2006, in Hampden Superior Court, Joel Vasquez pleaded guilty to murder in the second degree for the death of Jonathan Melendez. He was sentenced to life in prison with the possibility of parole.³ On that same date, Joel Vasquez pleaded guilty to felony possession of a firearm and received a 5 year sentence. On December 19, 2024, Joel Vasquez appeared before the Board for an initial hearing. He was represented by student attorneys Sydnee Johnson, Samantha Raymond, and Abigail Rosovsky from the Boston College Lifer Parole Clinic under the supervision of Attorney Frank Herrmann. The Board's decision fully incorporates by reference the entire video recording of Joel Vasquez's December 19, 2024, hearing.

STATEMENT OF THE CASE: On October 1, 2005, in West Springfield, 18-year-old Joel Vasquez shot and killed 23-year-old Jonathan Melendez. When police were dispatched to Birch Park Circle for a possible homicide, they discovered the body of Mr. Melendez. There were no

¹ Sandiford v. Massachusetts Parole Board, the Parole Board agreed to change its calculation of parole eligibility such that good conduct deductions are available to all persons serving life sentences with consecutive non-life sentences subject to certain statutory limitations.

² Two Board Members voted to grant parole to CRJ after 1 year in minimum security.

³ This sentence was to be served from and after the possession of firearm sentence

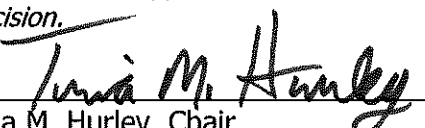
vital signs and a large amount of blood pooled from his head area. Officers observed three shell casings lying on the floor near the victim. It was later determined that Mr. Melendez was shot three times, with one shot directly at the forehead area.

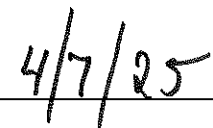
On November 13, 2005, an individual gave a recorded statement to police in which he admitted that he gave Mr. Vasquez the gun that was used to kill Jonathan Melendez with three bullets inside. Mr. Vasquez contacted this same individual, stating, "It's done. One in the head, two in the chest." Mr. Vasquez also admitted to this individual that he went to Mr. Melendez's house, knocked on the front door, and shot him.

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 (if applicable).

DECISION OF THE BOARD: This was Mr. Vasquez's first appearance before the Board. Mr. Vasquez was 18-years-old at the time of the offense. He is 38-years-old and has been incarcerated for 19 years. Mr. Vasquez acknowledged that the offense was gang-related, and that he rose through the ranks in the [STG] to second in command. He renounced from the gang, which was officially accepted in 2019. The Board notes he has invested in self-development and education. He achieved his BA, he is a mentor for Project Youth, and he received Best Speaker Award in 2020 through Toastmasters. Mr. Vasquez has completed programs related to Victim Impact, Conflict Resolution, and Vocational Skills Program in Environmental Cleaning. Mr. Vasquez became a Muslim in 2016. The majority of the Board remains concerned about his disciplinary history, which includes 2 DDU placements and 2 transfers to higher custody. The Board encourages him to remain disciplinary report free. The Board recommends that he continue to work on his insight into the harm he has caused and to pursue all additional programs that will enhance rehabilitation. Mr. Vasquez's friends, mother, and aunt all spoke in support of parole. Hampden County Assistant District Attorney Carmel Motherway, along with the mother, brother, and sister-in law of the victim spoke in opposition. The Board concludes that Joel Vasquez 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.


Tina M. Hurley, Chair


Date