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DECISION

IN THE MATTER OF

KEITH PELLETIER

W69179

TYPE OF HEARING: Review Hearing

DATE OF HEARING: February 7, 2017

DATE OF DECISION: August 3, 2017

PARTICIPATING BOARD MEMBERS: Paul M. Treseler, Dr. Charlene Bonner, Tonomey Coleman, Sheila Dupre, Tina Hurley, Lucy Soto-Abbe

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 scheduled in two years from the date of the hearing.

I. STATEMENT OF THE CASE

On February 27, 2001, in Essex County Superior Court, Keith Pelletier pled guilty to the second degree murder of Sharon Jankoski. A sentence of life in prison with the possibility of parole was imposed on Mr. Pelletier for the death of Ms. Jankoski. That same day, he also received a 5 to 7 year concurrent sentence for larceny of a motor vehicle.

Sharon Jankoski was a 35-year-old mother of four at the time of her death on February 27, 2000. Prior to her death, Ms. Jankoski and Mr. Pelletier had been dating for about two years. They had been living together for approximately one year at Ms. Jankoski's residence in Amesbury. The night before her death, Ms. Jankoski and Mr. Pelletier had a party at the house. At around midnight, the group left the house to go to a bar. They continued to drink at a local bar until it closed around 2:00 a.m. The group then returned to Ms. Jankoski's house and continued to drink and party. At around 7:00 a.m., on February 27, 2000, Mr. Pelletier said he

was tired and went to sleep in the bedroom he shared with Ms. Jankoski. Ms. Jankoski stayed up with Keith Wilcox and Mike Edmond, who were also staying at the house in another bedroom. A few hours later, Mr. Pelletier woke up and called for Ms. Jankoski to come to bed. When she entered the bedroom, they began to argue about their relationship. Ms. Jankoski told him that she no longer wanted to be with him. Mr. Pelletier became enraged and attacked her on the bed. He punched her in the face and began to strangle her. When he heard someone walking down the hall, he pulled the covers over himself and Ms. Jankoski and pretended to be asleep. When he heard the person walk away, he looked at Ms. Jankoski and saw that her eyes were closed and she was struggling to breathe. Mr. Pelletier then pulled the covers back over her and ran to the next room, where Mr. Edmond and Mr. Wilcox were sleeping. Mr. Pelletier removed Mr. Edmond's car key from his clothes on the floor and proceeded to steal his car.

Mr. Pelletier drove away from the house, alerting no one to Ms. Jankoski's condition. Early that afternoon, Mr. Edmond awoke and realized his car was missing. He and the others went into Ms. Jankoski's bedroom to ask her if anyone had taken his car. They found Ms. Jankoski unresponsive in her bed and called police. The autopsy revealed the cause of death to be strangulation. Mr. Pelletier was arrested the following day, after a high speed police chase. At the police station, Mr. Pelletier confessed to killing Ms. Jankoski.

II. PAROLE HEARING ON FEBRUARY 7, 2017

Mr. Pelletier, now 48-years-old, appeared before the Parole Board on February 7, 2017, for a review hearing. His initial hearing, on February 19, 2015, resulted in the denial of parole. In Mr. Pelletier's opening statement to the Board, he apologized to Ms. Jankoski's family and friends. During the hearing, Mr. Pelletier grew emotional when the Board raised the issue of whether he had done any work on victim empathy as part of his rehabilitative process. Mr. Pelletier responded that he did not fully understand the pain he had caused Ms. Jankoski's family, and particularly her children, until he heard them testify at his parole hearing in 2015. When asked to be more specific, Mr. Pelletier explained that he came to understand the difficulty Mr. Jankoski's children experienced growing up without a mother and, further, acknowledged that he was solely responsible for that pain.

Mr. Pelletier spoke about the events surrounding the murder of Ms. Jankoski. Mr. Pelletier could not remember how long it took him to kill Ms. Jankoski, but told the Board that she fought back and struggled with him. After fleeing the apartment, he drove to New York, where he spent the night in a motel. He then returned to Massachusetts the following day. Mr. Pelletier admitted that his intention was not to turn himself in, but felt as though he had no other choice than to return. Mr. Pelletier drove to his place of employment, where he called his brother and asked if Ms. Jankoski was dead. Upon learning that he had, in fact, killed her, Mr. Pelletier drank beer and consumed multiple amounts of Klonopin. Unbeknownst to him at the time, the police were at his brother's house and had traced his phone call. Shortly thereafter, police arrived and a high speed chase ensued, culminating in his arrest.

Mr. Pelletier admitted to inflicting mental and emotional abuse, both in his relationship with Ms. Jankoski, as well as in other long term romantic relationships. Mr. Pelletier told the Board, however, that he had never been physically violent in any of his relationships, with the exception of the night he murdered Ms. Jankoski. When asked what triggered the violence on

the night of her murder, Mr. Pelletier explained that he was at an extremely low point in his life. His rage was fueled by his feelings of guilt, shame, and low self-esteem over his personal failures at the time. Upon further inquiry by the Board, Mr. Pelletier acknowledged that some of the emotion that fueled his physical outburst that night was attributable to feelings of jealousy. He was careful to point out to the Board, however, that jealousy was not the only emotion he was experiencing that night.

During the hearing, Mr. Pelletier was asked to discuss his thoughts on the Board's decision to deny parole following his initial hearing. Mr. Pelletier stated that he was not shocked by the Board's decision and, that, he felt it was warranted. Mr. Pelletier further stated that the Board's decision identified two areas of concern with his rehabilitation: his lack of insight into his substance abuse problem and his inability to form healthy relationships (devoid of physical, mental, or emotional abuse). Mr. Pelletier stated that he immediately began to engage in programs that addressed those issues, such as Criminal Thinking, Violence Reduction, and the Correctional Recovery Academy, as well as Alcoholics Anonymous/Narcotics Anonymous. He described his addiction to alcohol as relentless and, further, acknowledged that he will need to manage his addiction for the rest of his life. Presently, Mr. Pelletier is enrolled in the general maintenance program for the Correctional Recovery Academy and attends Alcoholics Anonymous/Narcotics Anonymous on a weekly basis. He is also employed, working approximately six hours per day, seven days a week.

The Board considered oral testimony from Mr. Pelletier's mother, brother, son and sister-in-law, all of whom expressed support for parole. The Board also considered testimony from the victim's mother, sister, daughter, son, and friend, as well as Essex County Assistant District Attorney Emily Mello, all of whom expressed opposition to parole.

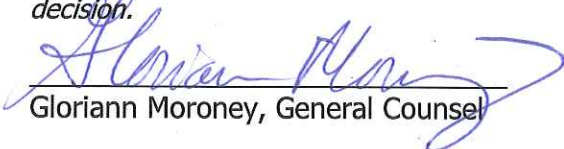
III. DECISION

The Board is of the opinion that Mr. Pelletier has not yet demonstrated a level of rehabilitative progress that would make his release compatible with the welfare of society. Mr. Pelletier should continue to engage in programming that addresses his issues with substance abuse and domestic violence. He should also maintain his continued positive adjustment.

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. Pelletier'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 whether risk reduction programs could effectively minimize Mr. Pelletier's risk of recidivism. After applying this standard to the circumstances of Mr. Pelletier's case, the Board is of the opinion that Mr. Pelletier is not yet rehabilitated and, therefore, does not merit parole at this time.

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


Gloriann Moroney, General Counsel

8/3/17
Date