



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Public Safety and Security



PAROLE BOARD

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DECISION

**IN THE MATTER OF
KEITH PELLETIER**

W69179

TYPE OF HEARING: Review Hearing

DATE OF HEARING: February 5, 2019

DATE OF DECISION: September 16, 2019

PARTICIPATING BOARD MEMBERS: Dr. Charlene Bonner, Tonomey Coleman, Sheila Dupre, Tina Hurley, Gloriann Moroney, 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 that the inmate is a suitable candidate for parole.¹ Parole is granted to a long-term residential program with special conditions, but not before completion of eighteen months in lower security.

I. STATEMENT OF THE CASE

On February 27, 2001, in Essex County Superior Court, Keith Pelletier pleaded guilty to the second degree murder of Sharon Jankoski. He was sentenced to life in prison with the possibility of parole. 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

¹ Two Board Members voted to deny parole with a review in two years.

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 that 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 5, 2019

Keith Pelletier, now 49-years-old, appeared before the Parole Board for a review hearing on February 5, 2019. He was represented by law student Keally Cieslik of Northeastern University. Mr. Pelletier was denied parole after his initial hearing in 2015 and after his review hearing in 2017. In his opening statement to the Board, Mr. Pelletier apologized to Ms. Jankoski's family and, in particular, to her children for taking the life of their mother. He told the Board that at the time of the murder, Ms. Jankoski was in a vulnerable place and had needed his support. Instead, all he did was "drag her down and make her feel worthless" as an abusive, alcoholic boyfriend.

Mr. Pelletier explained that he began drinking alcohol as a young child and had witnessed his mother suffer from the physical abuse of her boyfriends. He admitted that the difficult circumstances in which he was raised led to the development of significant control issues and a fear of abandonment. He also admitted that he was a severe alcoholic before his incarceration, drinking on a daily basis. In discussing the governing offense, Mr. Pelletier stated that he began drinking in the morning (as was his habit), only stopping in the early morning hours of the next day, just before he strangled Ms. Jankoski. When questioned by the Board as to what led to the assault on his girlfriend, Mr. Pelletier said that when Ms. Jankoski suggested she was interested in someone else, he burst into a rage fueled by feelings of jealousy, anger, and a loss of control. Mr. Pelletier admitted that he left her when she was unconscious (but still breathing), despite the opportunity to save her life, because he was "selfish" and "only thinking of himself." When he realized what he had done, Mr. Pelletier told the Board that he took numerous pills in an attempt to "get away and die."

When Board Members questioned him as to his rehabilitation, Mr. Pelletier admitted to minimizing his abusive behavior in the past because, prior to the abuse of Ms. Jankoski, he had not put his hands on a woman. He now recognizes that any type of abuse, physical or otherwise, is equally harmful and has the same effect on the victim. The Board noted that Mr. Pelletier examined his behavior as a batterer by seeking out an external domestic violence course, since one was not offered in the prison in which he was incarcerated. Mr. Pelletier explained that this program, among others like Anger Management, Violence Reduction, Alternatives to Violence, and the Graduate Maintenance Program, taught him that he was not the victim and that he, alone, was responsible for his actions.

The Board further noted that Mr. Pelletier has maintained employment in the prison property department and has not accrued any disciplinary reports throughout his 19 years of incarceration. Mr. Pelletier told the Board that, if granted parole, he would request a stepdown to lower security followed by release to a long-term residential program, like the Dismas House. He emphasized that he would rely on the community of his family and church, as well as counseling and Alcoholics Anonymous, to support him with reentry. Notably, Mr. Pelletier explained that he has seen "lifers" return to prison after growing "complacent," and that he recognizes he can never stop working on his rehabilitation, even if released.

Mr. Pelletier's mother, son, and daughter-in-law testified and submitted letters in support of parole. The Board also considered the written submissions of Mr. Pelletier's father, step-mother, brother, sister-in-law, and aunt in support of parole. Ms. Jankoski's mother, son, and two daughters testified in opposition to parole. The Board also considered written submissions including, but not limited to, Ms. Jankoski's daughter's fiancée, sister, and two family friends in opposition to parole. Essex County Assistant District Attorney Emily Mello testified and submitted a letter in opposition to parole.

III. DECISION

The Board is of the opinion that Mr. Pelletier has demonstrated a level of rehabilitative progress that would make his release compatible with the welfare of society. Mr. Pelletier appears to have benefited from treatment and programming.

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 a risk and needs assessment and 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 Keith Pelletier merits parole at this time. Parole is granted to a long-term residential program with special conditions, but not before completion of eighteen months in lower security.

SPECIAL CONDITIONS: Waive work for Long Term Residential Program; Must be at home between 10:00 pm and 6:00 am; 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 mental health counseling for adjustment/transition; Long Term Residential Treatment program for no less than six months; AA/NA at least three times/week; Mandatory sponsor.

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

9/16/2019
Date