



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



PAROLE BOARD

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Executive Director

RECORD OF DECISION

IN THE MATTER OF

MARK VAN ZANT

**(Formerly known as Mark Russell)
W54689**

TYPE OF HEARING: Review Hearing

DATE OF HEARING: April 6, 2021

DATE OF DECISION: October 25, 2021

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

STATEMENT OF THE CASE: On June 24, 1993, after a jury trial in Middlesex Superior Court, Mark Van Zant (formerly known as Mark Russell) was found guilty of the second-degree murder of 39-year-old Deborah Sweeney and was sentenced to serve life in prison with the possibility of parole.

Mr. Van Zant appeared before the Parole Board for a review hearing on April 6, 2021, and was represented by Boston College Law students Sarah Brooks, Alexander Truchetta, and Mariah Parks. This was Mr. Van Zant's fourth appearance before the Board having been denied in 2008, 2013 and 2016. The entire video recording of Mr. Van Zant's April 6, 2021, hearing is fully incorporated by reference to the Board's decision.

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 parole¹. Reserve to Long Term Residential Program but not before nine months in lower security. Mr. Van Zant has served over 29 years with minimal disciplinary reports. He has maintained his sobriety for 28 years and has been active in AA/NA since 2006. He recently completed Advanced Anger Management, and received a low score on the LS/CMI.

¹ Five Board Members voted to grant parole, and one Board Member voted to deny parole with a review in two years.

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. Van Zant'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. Van Zant's risk of recidivism. After applying this appropriately high standard to the circumstances of Mr. Van Zant's case, the Board is of the opinion that Mr. Van Zant is rehabilitated and merits parole at this time.

Special Conditions: Reserve to Long Term Residential Program (LTRP); Waive work for two weeks or LTRP; Curfew 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 mental health counseling for adjustment/transition; AA/NA at least 3 times/week; May have contact with [two named individuals].

I certify that this is the decision and reasons of the Massachusetts Parole Board regarding the above referenced hearing.



Pamela Murphy, General Counsel

10/25/2021
Date