



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Public Safety and Security

PAROLE BOARD

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DECISION

IN THE MATTER OF

MICHAEL SKINNER

W42105

TYPE OF HEARING: Review Hearing

DATE OF HEARING: October 17, 2017

DATE OF DECISION: September 24, 2018

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 that the inmate is a suitable candidate for parole with special conditions.¹ Parole is reserved to the inmate's consecutive sentence.

I. STATEMENT OF THE CASE

On February 4, 1986, after a jury trial, Michael Skinner was convicted of the first degree murder of 32-year-old Robert Cahill. After he appealed his conviction, the Supreme Judicial Court reversed it due to faulty jury instruction and remanded the case to Superior Court for a new trial.² On August 23, 1991, after a second jury trial, Mr. Skinner was convicted of second degree murder and sentenced to life in prison with the possibility of parole. While Mr. Skinner was on bail awaiting his second trial for the murder of Mr. Cahill, he pleaded guilty to assault and battery and was given a 5 to 10 year sentence to be served from and after the life sentence.

¹ Four Board Members voted to parole Mr. Skinner to his consecutive sentence. Two Board Members voted to deny parole with a review in two years.

² *Commonwealth v. Skinner*, 408 Mass. 88 (1990)

On July 5, 1985, 18-year-old Michael Skinner shot and killed Robert Cahill. Mr. Skinner and Mr. Cahill had worked together at Webb Converting, Inc. in Natick. At the time, Mr. Skinner bet on baseball games by having Mr. Cahill place the bets with Mr. Cahill's bookie. Shortly before the murder, Mr. Skinner was behind in his payments and owed Mr. Cahill's bookie nearly \$500. On the day of the murder, Mr. Skinner and Mr. Cahill met as planned at a local restaurant in Framingham, with the purpose of the meeting to have Mr. Skinner pay off his debt. Mr. Skinner suggested moving the conversation to the parking lot of their office building, which was uncrowded since July 5 was a holiday for the company. Mr. Skinner had a loaded .22 caliber rifle in his car. Mr. Cahill parked his car first and then read the newspaper, as he waited for Mr. Skinner. Mr. Skinner then parked his car, so that his window was near Mr. Cahill's window. Mr. Skinner then took his rifle and shot Mr. Cahill once in the head, killing him instantly. After the murder, Mr. Skinner went to a family picnic and then on a date. During the course of the police investigation, Mr. Skinner admitted to shooting Mr. Cahill.

II. PAROLE HEARING ON OCTOBER 17, 2017

Michael Skinner, now 50-years-old, appeared before the Parole Board for a review hearing on October 17, 2017. He was represented by Attorney Kevin Mahoney. Mr. Skinner was denied parole after his initial hearing in 2002, as well as after his review hearings in 2007 and 2013. In his opening statement to the Board, Mr. Skinner apologized to the Cahill family and expressed his remorse for taking the life of Robert Cahill. He also apologized for all the pain and hardship he caused his own family and friends. Mr. Skinner said that after his last parole was denied, he initially resigned himself to the fact that he was never going home. He explained, however, that he recognized he was at a crossroads and then resolved to turn his life around. After he was transferred to MCI-Shirley, Mr. Skinner became involved in the church, as well as caring for a wheelchair bound friend. He graduated from the Culinary Arts program and became a tutor. He became involved in programming, including Project Youth, Jericho Circle, and a prisoner's re-offender program. Mr. Skinner stated that he is better prepared for parole than he was five years ago.

The Board asked Mr. Skinner to explain why he committed murder over a relatively small amount of money. Mr. Skinner stated that he was the primary breadwinner and caretaker for his house-bound parents and 15-year-old brother. He started placing bets with Mr. Cahill to try to bring home a little extra money. After a few losses, Mr. Skinner said he realized he was not going to be able to pay rent or bills for his family because of his gambling debts. Mr. Skinner said he offered to pay the bookie half of the debt, but the bookie refused. Mr. Skinner agreed to meet Mr. Cahill and his associates at a local restaurant to discuss the debt. Mr. Skinner told the Board he took his father's rifle to the meeting because he assumed the men he was meeting would be armed. Mr. Skinner met Mr. Cahill alone at the restaurant, but Mr. Skinner said he was paranoid and wanted to meet on familiar ground, so the two men agreed to move the meeting to the isolated parking lot where they worked. Mr. Skinner said he and Mr. Cahill parked their cars, window to window, and waited for the bookie to show up. At a certain point, however, Mr. Skinner said he got nervous and picked up the gun, pointed it out the window, and shot Mr. Cahill. Board Members noted that parole had previously been denied because Mr. Skinner's story about the murder has changed over the years. Mr. Skinner recognized that in the past, he had not been completely honest with the Parole Board, saying that the shooting was an accident. At

this hearing, however, Mr. Skinner said he intended to shoot Mr. Cahill and that it was not an accident.

Board Members questioned Mr. Skinner about his institutional adjustment. Mr. Skinner explained that as a 22-year-old man entering prison, he had adjustment problems that resulted in disciplinary tickets for fighting and having weapons. Board Members expressed their concern about other disciplinary reports, such as smuggling drugs into prison and sleeping with a female corrections officer. Mr. Skinner said that he had befriended a staff member, and the two conspired to smuggle steroids and other drugs into the prison. Mr. Skinner explained that (at that time of his life) he was not focused on rehabilitation or getting out of prison. Mr. Skinner said that he also was not thinking about the consequences of sleeping with a staff member.

Mr. Skinner said that after he was transferred to MCI-Shirley, he became serious about rehabilitation. He told the Board that through counseling, the Jericho Circle program, the Re-Offenders program, as well as working with Project Youth, he came to realize that he was sabotaging himself with bad choices. Mr. Skinner particularly credited one on one counseling and the Jericho Circle with teaching him to ask for help and advice when he finds himself at a crossroads, which has made all the difference. Mr. Skinner told the Board that he encourages students in his Project Youth group to do the same. He also said he encourages students to talk about their problems and emotions with their mentors and peers, and not to hold things in or try to "go it alone." Mr. Skinner told the Board that he goes to counseling twice a month and meets with members of the Project Youth group twice a month.

Mr. Skinner asked the Parole Board to parole him to his home and after sentence of 5 to 10 years. After that, he would prefer to go to the Gavin House, or something similar, and then eventually live with his brother. Mr. Skinner stated that he would continue to be involved in the Re-Offender program, as well as remain active in his church.

Michael Skinner's brother and two friends spoke in support of parole. A Victim Services Coordinator read letters from Mr. Cahill's two brothers in opposition to parole. In addition, Middlesex County Assistant District Attorney Kate Kleimola testified in opposition to parole.

III. DECISION

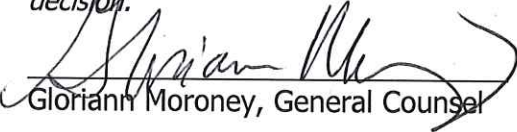
The Board is of the opinion that Michael Skinner has demonstrated a level of rehabilitative progress that would make his release to a consecutive sentence compatible with the welfare of society. Mr. Skinner has had a positive adjustment and has fully availed himself of rehabilitation. Mr. Skinner should continue to engage in programming that will aid him in his reintegration.

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. Skinner'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. Skinner's risk of recidivism.

After applying this appropriately high standard to the circumstances of Mr. Skinner's case, the Board is of the opinion that Michael Skinner merits parole at this time to his consecutive sentence.

SPECIAL CONDITIONS: Release to from and after sentence; Supervise for drugs, testing in accordance with agency policy; Supervise for alcohol abstinence, testing in accordance with agency policy; Mandatory adhere to the rules and regulations of the Department of Correction and comply with recommended programming/employment.

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.


Gloriana Moroney, General Counsel

9/24/18
Date