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**PAROLE BOARD**

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Charlene Bonner  
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**DECISION**

**IN THE MATTER OF**  
**MUHAMMAD SAHIN**  
**W68017**

**TYPE OF HEARING:** Initial Hearing

**DATE OF HEARING:** October 28, 2014

**DATE OF DECISION:** March 19, 2015

**PARTICIPATING BOARD MEMBERS:** Dr. Charlene Bonner, Tonomey Coleman, Sheila Dupre, Ina Howard-Hogan, Tina Hurley, Lucy Soto-Abbe

**DECISION OF THE BOARD:** After careful consideration of all relevant facts, including the nature of the underlying 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 in five years from the date of the hearing.

**I. STATEMENT OF THE CASE**

On April 24, 2000, in Worcester Superior Court, Muhammad Sahin pleaded guilty to one count of second degree murder and was sentenced to life in prison. On that same date, he also pleaded guilty to one count of burglary and one count of conspiracy to commit murder and received 10 to 15 year sentences on each count. All sentences were ordered to run concurrently.

Muhammad Sahin was a member of a gang and acted in his capacity as a "soldier" on the night of the murder. The victim, Luz Maria Martinez Rondeau (hereinafter Rondeau), was the ex-girlfriend of the designated leader of the gang, James Freeman III. She was scheduled to testify against Freeman at a trial for a prior home invasion in which two occupants were shot and one was killed.

On February 23, 1999, Sahin was at a bar when another member of the gang came in and informed him that he was delivering a message from Freeman to murder Ms. Rondeau. Sahin left the bar and went to a late-night house party before joining Jesus Mercedes. The two

drove to Ms. Rondeau's apartment and parked up the street. Sahin exited the car, walked to the apartment building, and went up the stairs to the third floor. He easily kicked in the door, entered the apartment, and immediately went to the victim's bedroom. He walked over to her bed where she lay asleep, pointed the gun at her head, and pulled the trigger. Also in the bed was Ms. Rondeau's three year-old daughter. Sahin left the apartment, ran down the stairs, exited the building, got into Mercedes' car, and was driven away. He was arrested a couple of months later at the home of his daughter's mother.

## **II. PAROLE HEARING ON OCTOBER 28, 2014**

Muhammad Sahin, age 37, appeared before the Parole Board for his initial hearing on October 28, 2014. He had postponed his scheduled May 2014 hearing. He has served over 15 years of a life sentence for second degree murder and was represented by a Northeastern University School of Law student attorney.

In his opening statement, Sahin apologized to the victim's family and to the community for his "disgusting actions." He described being "overwhelmingly ashamed and deeply remorseful" and "accepts complete and utter responsibility for the death of Ms. Rondeau." The student attorney said that Sahin has turned his life around and has fulfilled his rehabilitation objectives during his incarceration. She said that, through extensive enrollment in therapeutic and educational programming, Sahin has addressed the issues that lead him to commit the murder of Ms. Rondeau. Sahin's attorney stated that Sahin recognizes that he was a follower who was desperate to be accepted. This desperation left him unwilling to take the initiative to be a leader and turn his life around. While it took him years to do so, his attorney said that he now takes full responsibility for his actions.

Sahin reportedly postponed his initial parole hearing because he needed help. Sahin was asked to provide the Parole Board with his progress in rehabilitation. He is currently incarcerated at MCI-Norfolk and participates in a music theory program and attends the Second Thoughts Program. Additionally, he maintains employment on the weekends doing janitorial work. Sahin recently enrolled in both a computer program and literature class. Sahin reports that some of the programs have helped him learn different communication tools, as well as gain insight into his anger issues. He said that "Emotional Awareness helped me address these issues. I started early on taking my emotions and turning them into anger. It was an easier emotion to deal with. Anger was glorified in the lifestyle I was living." He stated that the Restorative Justice Program "brought me to understand the pain the family has had to live with." In addition to the rehabilitative programs, Sahin received his GED in July 2014. He also completed Toastmasters, which taught him how to speak and communicate clearly.

When asked to describe relevant experiences that contributed to his criminal history, Sahin provided his history of a dysfunctional childhood. Sahin stated that he was physically abused by both his mother and father. Additionally, he witnessed domestic violence between his parents. He has two sisters and one brother, all of whom were in the custody of the Department of Social Services (DSS), due to their parents' drug addictions and abusive behavior. At age 10, Sahin began selling drugs and joined a gang, but was then removed from his home by DSS. Upon returning home, he became a member of a second gang and later joined forces with a third gang. Sahin began carrying a firearm at age 14, when he was a member of the second gang. He also participated in shoot outs, although he denies shooting

anyone. He returned home from time to time, but mostly stayed with various friends. In 1996, Sahin was charged with burning personal property and malicious destruction of property and was incarcerated for seven months. He described the crime by saying that he was driving someone's car and he "got into a car accident. At that time, I lost the car payment money - I wasn't selling drugs at that time. So I had the idea to blow the car up and collect on the insurance." In 1997, Sahin was charged with assault and battery with a dangerous weapon (stick) due to a dispute that took place over a female. Also in 1997, he was charged with both assault and battery and assault and battery by means of a dangerous weapon (shod foot) over a dispute at a party with gang members. The case was dismissed. Sahin was paroled on a prior drug case, which he violated when he committed the murder.

Sahin described the events leading up to the murder of Ms. Rondeau. He stated that he was dealing drugs for Jesus Mercedes' cousin and (prior to his incarceration) was making \$4,000 a week selling crack. Sahin was a "soldier" for the third gang, Mercedes was considered the "Chief Elite," and James Freeman was considered the leader. Sahin gained the trust of the "superiors" because "whatever he asked me to do in the past was done. The only time I fell short was one particular time, I got my head split open." Sahin then continued to do what he was told, including shooting at rival gangs, overseeing small missions, and providing security.

When Freeman was incarcerated, he asked to see Sahin because Ms. Rondeau (Freeman's ex-girlfriend) was a government witness. Sahin said, "I went to go see him in prison and he stated that he wanted me to hold him down, meaning that I was to take care of whatever he needs taken care of due to the courts indictment. He said if she continues working with the prosecution, he wanted me to kill her. Two months later another member of the gang delivered the message to 'go do that and it has to happen. It's either her or you'. It wasn't a thought through plan. I was told to carry it out and there was a member from the St. Louis chapter of the third gang there to make sure it was carried out."

On the evening of the murder, Sahin and Mercedes went to the victim's home. Sahin explained that he always carried his gun and had it with him that evening. He went on to describe the murder by saying that he "went in through the front entrance of the apartment building, went up to the third floor, I kicked the door open, I made my way to the room, directly on the right, her head was sticking out the blankets, I pointed the gun down, put the gun to her head and I pulled the trigger. Her daughter's head popped up out of the blanket, we looked at each other for a brief moment and then I ran. I ran outside, I got sick, I ran to the vehicle and got in the passenger seat. Mr. Mercedes sped off. We went back to Alpine Street and he parked and I got out the vehicle and went to the back of the building looking for somewhere to stash the gun. I hid it, but went back and retrieved it and drove down the street and threw the gun down the sewer. Then went back to the house party we had been at earlier. I had been drinking vodka and sniffed cocaine while at the party." Sahin attended the victim's funeral and said, "I believe I was trying to come to terms with what I did." He was arrested a few months later.

A Board Member asked Sahin why he was chosen to carry out the murder of Ms. Rondeau. He answered, "I believe I was the most vulnerable, I was the follower." One Board Member pointed out it appeared that Freeman had confidence that he could carry out the murder of Ms. Rondeau, as he was the most qualified and the most familiar with Ms. Rondeau, her family, and the apartment. Sahin responded, "I had to prove myself so that's what I was

doing. Ms. Martinez [Rondeau] and her family, we've been in each other's lives for years. She was dating Mr. Freeman and we were all familiar with each other. Everything I've done in my past, this by far hurts most. I know her sisters and her parents. I spent many times in their home. I followed through with it because I was a follower and I made the wrong decision. I was a criminal. I wanted to work my way up. I wanted status within the gang." He admitted that he knew the victim since age 16 and at one time dated her sister. He stated, "I would like to make it clear that I'm not making any excuses for what I have done. I wish I had otherwise; I was scared for my life at the time. It happened right after my 22<sup>nd</sup> birthday."

Sahin was asked of his status in the gang after the murder of Ms. Rondeau. He stated, "After the murder, my role within the gang wasn't discussed. I kind of separated myself. After I did what I did, I honestly felt like my life was coming to an end at that point. I wasn't looking for any recognition. I kind of went into a depression. Sometime later I went to jail for it." Sahin denied participating in any other illegal activity after the murder and said that he formally renounced gang participation in 2002. Regarding his institutional adjustment, Sahin stated that he has received approximately 30 disciplinary reports, including six for fighting. His last disciplinary report for fighting was in March 2014, but he maintains he was not the aggressor. One Board Member noted that his disciplinary history appears as problematic in his request for parole and shows a troubling pattern of behavior.

In 2010, a restraining order was issued against him due to an incident that occurred with one of the mothers' of his children. When asked to explain the incident, Sahin stated that he "never physically threatened her. I threatened to contact her family. I was a secret to her family even though we had a child together." Sahin denied making any threats and the restraining order was vacated per the plaintiff's request. Sahin was questioned about an incident involving another one of his girlfriends and his cellmate. He stated that he threatened his ex-girlfriend, but had a "civil" conversation with his cellmate. Sahin was questioned regarding his pattern of violence against women. Specifically, he was asked about the restraining order issued against him, the disciplinary report involving his visitor, the incidents of placing prior girlfriends in fear, and the prior violence of breaking a girlfriend's jaw and setting a girlfriend's car on fire. He stated, "I believe I was manipulative and my character as far as relationships and females was horrible and poor."

Sahin's parole plans include completion of a welding program to obtain a license. He is requesting to step-down through minimum security, to transition to a half-way house, and to attend counseling. His support system in the community includes the mothers' of his children (with whom he states he has no conflict), his sister, his brother, his nephew and his children. Although he maintains contact with his mother via telephone calls and letters, he will rely on his other family members for support. Sahin's nephew and ex-girlfriend spoke in support of his parole.

Ms. Rondeau's daughter and two sisters spoke in opposition of parole. Worcester County Assistant District Attorney Michelle King also spoke in opposition of parole. ADA King said Sahin was offered a plea deal to second degree murder (as witnesses would not testify against him) indicating that, but for such factors, Sahin would not have had this opportunity for parole. ADA King provided testimony to the Board that indicated Sahin does not meet the legal standard for parole.


### III. DECISION

Muhammad Sahin is incarcerated for a senseless execution-style murder of a government witness which was carried out in front of the victim's three year-old daughter. The murder occurred while Sahin was under parole supervision for a prior drug offense. The multiple disciplinary reports acquired during his incarceration, including a 2014 assault, indicate that he still maintains the same lifestyle habits and criminal behavior that he demonstrated in the community.

Sahin has a history of violence against women and lacks insight into his domestic violence issues and offenses. He is manipulative and controlling in his relationships, especially with women. Although he has participated in multiple rehabilitative programs, he needs further rehabilitation. He fails to demonstrate the skills that (he says) he has learned in violence reduction programming. Sahin needs to explore programming that addresses healthy relationships, as well as the causative factors of his continued criminal thinking. Additionally, Sahin lacks insight into the motivation and particulars as to why he was chosen to carry out the murder.

The standard we apply in assessing candidates for parole is set out in 120 C.M.R. 300.04, which provides that "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." Applying that appropriately high standard here, it is the unanimous opinion of the Board that Muhammad Sahin does not merit parole at this time because he is not rehabilitated. The review will be in five years, during which time Sahin should commit to a more comprehensive rehabilitation that addresses criminal thinking, non-violent conflict resolution, candor, and the causes and prevention of domestic violence.

*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.*

  
Janis DiLoreto Smith, Executive Director

3/19/15  
Date