

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



**PAROLE BOARD**

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**RECORD OF DECISION**

**IN THE MATTER OF**

**NURI MUHAMMAD**

**FKA LAMAR JOHNSON**

**W53830**

**TYPE OF HEARING:** Initial Hearing

**DATE OF HEARING:** March 16, 2021

**DATE OF DECISION:** July 19, 2021

**PARTICIPATING BOARD MEMBERS:** Dr. Charlene Bonner, Tonomey Coleman, Sheila Dupre, Tina Hurley, Colette Santa<sup>1</sup>

**STATEMENT OF THE CASE:** On January 14, 1993, after a jury trial in Suffolk Superior Court, Nuri Muhammad was convicted of the first-degree murder of Charleston Sarjeant and was sentenced to life imprisonment without the possibility of parole. On that same date, he was also convicted of assault and battery by means of a dangerous weapon and was sentenced to 3-5 years to run concurrently with the life sentence. On December 15, 2020, after a motion for post-conviction relief, Mr. Muhammad's first-degree murder conviction was vacated and reduced to second degree murder. He was re-sentenced to life imprisonment with the possibility of parole.

On the night of April 24, 1992, Charleston Sarjeant, with his wife and friend, Eddy Toomer, entered the Tasty Chicken restaurant in the Dorchester section of Boston and ordered food. Sarjeant and his companions waited facing the counter, with their backs to the glass door in the front of the restaurant. While Sarjeant and his companions were inside the restaurant, a group of young men, including Mr. Muhammad (formerly known as Lamar Johnson), gathered on a traffic island in front of the restaurant. One of the young men, James Villaroel, threw a beer bottle against the front of the restaurant causing Mr. Sarjeant and his companions to turn and look. He then shouted, "Let's shut him down" (or words to that effect) and moved toward the restaurant. The rest of the group followed. Mr. Villaroel entered the restaurant first,

<sup>1</sup> Chair Moroney recused.

carrying a large radio. Without saying a word, Mr. Villaroel struck Mr. Sarjeant in the back and side of the head with the radio. Within seconds, ten to twelve men, including Mr. Muhammad, encircled Mr. Sarjeant and began beating, punching, and kicking him. Mr. Villaroel pulled a knife from his back pocket and began stabbing Mr. Sarjeant. During the stabbing, the other attackers, including Mr. Muhammad, continued to punch, kick, and stomp on the victim. The attackers left as a group when Mr. Sarjeant fell to the floor and became unconscious. Mr. Sarjeant was beaten about the head and face. He was stabbed repeatedly. The police arrived promptly, followed by medical personnel. Mr. Sarjeant died while en route to the hospital.<sup>2</sup>

Mr. Muhammad appeared before the Parole Board for an initial hearing on March 16, 2021 and was represented by Attorney Kelly Cusack. The entire video recording of Mr. Muhammad's March 16, 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 parole.<sup>3</sup> Reserve to a halfway house after completion of the Correctional Recovery Academy ("CRA") and twelve months in lower security. He has served approximately 28 years for the murder of Charleston Sarjeant. During this commitment he has completed numerous programs to include Restorative Justice, several phases of Alternatives to Violence, Emotional Awareness, he has been active in the African American Coalition for the past two years and remains active in AA/NA. [He has had an] overall positive institutional adjustment. Mr. Muhammad has refrained from engaging in any acts of violence in his 28 years of incarceration. He is also a member of Project Youth and is actively pursuing his General Equivalency Diploma. He has a strong support network that will support him as he reintegrates. He has demonstrated that he is motivated to succeed.

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

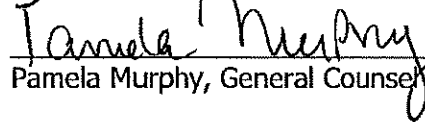
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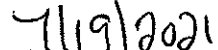
<sup>2</sup> Commonwealth v. Semedo, 422 Mass. 716 (1996); *see also*, Commonwealth v. Johnson, 425 Mass. 609 (1997).

<sup>3</sup> Three board members voted to parole Mr. Muhammad to a halfway house after completion of the CRA and 12 months in lower security. Two board members voted to deny parole with a review in two years.

**Special Conditions:** Reserve to a halfway house for a minimum six months after 12 months in lower security; Waive work for two weeks; 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; Mandatory – may have contact with [named individual].

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

  
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Pamela Murphy, General Counsel

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date