

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



PAROLE BOARD

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Secretary

DECISION

IN THE MATTER OF

PETER HOLBROOK

W38068

TYPE OF HEARING: Review Hearing

DATE OF HEARING: August 26, 2021

DATE OF DECISION: June 28, 2022

PARTICIPATING BOARD MEMBERS: Gloriann Moroney, Dr. Charlene Bonner, Tonomey Coleman, Sheila Dupre, Tina Hurley, 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 not a suitable candidate for parole.¹ Parole is denied with a review scheduled in two years from the date of the hearing.

I. STATEMENT OF THE CASE

On February 24, 1981, in Essex Superior Court, Peter Holbrook pleaded guilty to murder in the second degree and was sentenced to life in prison with the possibility of parole.

On June 25, 1980, Peter Holbrook (age 29) called Georgetown police to report that he had struck his mother, Alberta Holbrook (age 65), several times on the head with a hatchet. When officers responded to the home, they found Mrs. Holbrook in a chair, apparently watching television. She was unconscious and bleeding from severe lacerations to the top of her head. Mr. Holbrook reportedly stated to police that he had struck his mother because he was bored and that his life was going nowhere. Mrs. Holbrook died three days later as a result of her injuries.

¹ Two Board Members voted to grant parole to a VA Hospital.

During the course of his legal proceedings, Mr. Holbrook was sent to Bridgewater State Hospital for a Competency to Stand Trial Evaluation and a Criminal Responsibility Evaluation. During the evaluation, he stated that he killed his mother to prevent "myself from thinking the same things again about my job and where I was living. I thought it would stop everything. Her and I couldn't agree on anything. She would lecture me. I reached the bottom of the pit. I was hopeless. I couldn't think of a way out of it. I was thinking of doing it from behind her. I shouldn't have done it as I did it. It was just a game, really." Mr. Holbrook also stated that he had been thinking about killing his mother for over a year. Upon completion of both evaluations, the evaluator opined that Mr. Holbrook was competent to stand trial and was criminally responsible.

II. PAROLE HEARING ON AUGUST 26, 2021

Peter Holbrook, now 71-years-old, appeared before the Parole Board for his review hearing on August 26, 2021. He was represented by Attorney Russell Sobelman. Mr. Holbrook had been denied parole after his initial hearing in 1995, and after review hearings in 1998, 2003, 2008, 2013, and 2018. In his opening statement, Attorney Sobelman indicated that Mr. Holbrook accepts full responsibility for his mother's death, as he did 40 years ago when he committed the murder. Attorney Sobelman reported that Mr. Holbrook "thinks about" his mother often and feels "ashamed," although he cannot articulate why he killed her. He requested that the Board consider paroling Mr. Holbrook to an alternative program to better address his needs.

The Board noted that Mr. Holbrook has a documented history of mental illness. His first known hospitalizations were in the 1970's, following multiple suicide attempts that included an overdose and jumping off a roof. Mr. Holbrook was hospitalized in 1973, at Danvers State Hospital, after violating probation on a breaking and entering charge. His first admission to Bridgewater State Hospital occurred in 1977, although there was not a clear diagnosis at the time. Since his incarceration, however, Mr. Holbrook's mental health records indicate a consistent diagnosis of paranoid schizophrenia. Mr. Holbrook suffered from mental illness and substance abuse issues at the time of the murder. He admitted to being under the influence of substances on the day of the crime.

Mr. Holbrook's symptoms have persisted throughout his incarceration, resulting in numerous mental health commitments. He has been prescribed over a dozen medications, which have been the subject of Rogers orders due to a history of non-compliance. The Board noted that his recurring refusal to take all his medication is of major concern, given his troubling pattern of violence. Mr. Holbrook agreed with the Board that he can get violent in certain circumstances and has been disciplined repeatedly for assaultive behavior toward other inmates. The Board, however, commended Mr. Holbrook for obtaining his GED while incarcerated. Attorney Sobelman acknowledged that Mr. Holbrook does not meet the legal standard of parole for release into general society. Instead, Attorney Sobelman suggested that Mr. Holbrook could be successful on parole if released into the care of a Veteran Affairs hospital.

The Essex County District Attorney's Office testified and provided a letter in opposition to parole.

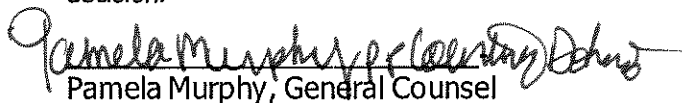
III. DECISION

The Board is of the opinion that Peter Holbrook has not demonstrated a level of rehabilitative progress that would make his release compatible with the welfare of society. Mr. Holbrook is serving a life sentence for the murder of his mother in 1980. He still struggles with violent and concerning behavior as indicated by three disciplinary reports for assaultive behavior against other inmates since his last hearing. Since 2013, he has continued to refuse participation in recommended programming. Mr. Holbrook suffers from schizophrenia, paranoid type. He has a history of non-compliance with medication requiring Rogers orders. He needs to exhibit a longer period of stability, medication compliance, and refraining from violence. The Board encourages a current comprehensive forensic evaluation to give an assessment of his mental health and needs.

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. The Board also considered a risk and needs assessment, and whether risk reduction programs could effectively minimize Mr. Holbrook's risk of recidivism. The Board considered Mr. Holbrook's institutional behavior, as well as his participation in available work, educational, and treatment programs during the period of incarceration. After applying this standard to the circumstances of Mr. Holbrook's case, the Board is of the opinion that Peter Holbrook is not yet rehabilitated and, therefore, does not merit parole at this time.

Mr. Holbrook's next appearance before the Board will take place in two years from the date of this hearing. During the interim, the Board encourages Mr. Holbrook to continue working towards his full rehabilitation.

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

6/28/22
Date