



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



PAROLE BOARD

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DECISION

IN THE MATTER OF

PETER HOLBROOK

W38068

TYPE OF HEARING: **Review Hearing**

DATE OF HEARING: **August 28, 2018**

DATE OF DECISION: **June 10, 2019**

PARTICIPATING BOARD MEMBERS: Paul M. Treseler, Dr. Charlene Bonner, Tonomey Coleman, Sheila Dupre, Tina Hurley, Lucy Soto-Abbe, 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 by unanimous vote that the inmate is not a suitable candidate for parole. Parole is denied with a review scheduled in three 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 his life was going nowhere, so he decided to do something about it. He later stated to police that he did it, but that he did not do it right, as he did not kill her. Mrs. Holbrook died three days later as a result of the injuries.

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 he killed his mother "probably from preventing 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 one 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 28, 2018

Peter Holbrook, now 67-years-old, appeared before the Parole Board for his review hearing on August 28, 2018. 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, and 2013. Attorney Sobelman provided an opening statement on Mr. Holbrook's behalf, highlighting Mr. Holbrook's accomplishments since his last hearing and outlining his proposed parole plan. In discussing the governing offense, Mr. Holbrook did not dispute the facts of the case. Board Members asked Mr. Holbrook to reflect and identify the precipitant as to why he brutally murdered his mother. He informed the Board that at the time of the offense, he believed his mother was having an affair with a friend of his. Although he expressed his remorse for taking his mother's life, Mr. Holbrook's motive remains unclear to the Board, as he has provided varying statements in the past.

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 again in 1973, at Danvers State Hospital, after violating probation on a breaking and entering charge. His first admission to Bridgewater State Hospital was in 1977, but there was no clear diagnosis at the time. Since his incarceration, however, Mr. Holbrook's mental health records indicate that he has been most consistently diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia. He has been admitted to Bridgewater State Hospital on seven occasions during this commitment. When the Board inquired as to Mr. Holbrook's understanding of his mental health diagnosis, he said he recognizes that his prior decompensation was due to failure to maintain compliance with his medication regimen. He assured the Board that he fully understands the importance of maintaining compliance with his medication and treatment protocol and, also, understands the consequences associated with noncompliance.

The Board questioned Mr. Holbrook as to his progress in rehabilitation since his commitment, as well as his level of insight and candor, in order to evaluate his parole suitability. Mr. Holbrook is currently incarcerated at North Central Correctional Institution, where he resides in the Residential Treatment Unit. He is not currently employed, but is compliant with treatment/programming. However, he incurred a disciplinary infraction on July 18, 2018, for assaulting another inmate. When pressed as to his behavior, Mr. Holbrook informed the Board that he did not know what got into him; he made an impulsive decision to start swinging at the victim. He also stated that he was depressed at the time of the incident.

The Essex County District Attorney's Office provided a letter in opposition to parole. Essex County Assistant District Attorney Elin Graydon spoke in strong 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. The Board recognizes that Mr. Holbrook has been diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia. He continues to demonstrate violent behavior toward others that may or may not be related to mental illness. Despite compliance with mental health treatment, Mr. Holbrook remains on a Rogers Order and continues to exhibit assaultive behavior. He would benefit from a current mental health evaluation to inform the Board of his risk 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 rehabilitated and, therefore, does not merit parole at this time.

Mr. Holbrook's next appearance before the Board will take place in three 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


Date