

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
Executive Office of Public Safety and Security



PAROLE BOARD

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**DECISION**

**IN THE MATTER OF**

**RANDY WILLIAMS**

**W67326**

**TYPE OF HEARING:** Review Hearing

**DATE OF HEARING:** September 15, 2020

**DATE OF DECISION:** May 20, 2021

**PARTICIPATING BOARD MEMBERS:** Gloriann Moroney, Dr. Charlene Bonner, Tonomey Coleman, Sheila Dupre, Tina Hurley, Karen McCarthy, 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.<sup>1</sup> Parole is denied with a review scheduled in two years from the date of the hearing.

**I. STATEMENT OF THE CASE**

On November 10, 1999, Randy Williams pleaded guilty to the murder of 19-year-old Helena Gardner. He was convicted of second degree murder and sentenced to life in prison with the possibility of parole. On that same date, Mr. Williams received a 7 to 8 year concurrent sentence for kidnapping and assault and battery by means of a dangerous weapon.

On March 25, 1997, Randy Williams and his co-defendants, Nichole Fernandes and Mark McCray, went to a Boston homeless shelter in search of Helena Gardner. Their intent was to confront her about remarks she had made about them. At the shelter, Mr. Williams and his co-defendants convinced Ms. Gardner to accompany them to an abandoned trailer in Cambridge, which they frequently used as a place to sleep. Once they were all inside the trailer, Ms. Gardner was bound with wire and gagged. Ms. Fernandes struck her with a metal rod several times, while

<sup>1</sup> One Board Member voted to parole Mr. Williams to Interstate Compact.

Mr. Williams beat her. Ms. Fernandes also used thorns from a rose stem to cut Ms. Gardner's face. She then lit Ms. Gardner's hair on fire and stabbed her with scissors, which were left embedded in her neck. When Ms. Fernandes fell backwards in the chair to which she was bound, Mr. McCray urinated in her mouth. Lastly, after Mr. McCray handed Ms. Fernandes a sledge hammer, she proceeded to strike Ms. Gardner on the head.

The trailer was set on fire once Ms. Gardner succumbed to her injuries. The group left the scene to procure an alibi, but all were arrested approximately 10 days later.

## **II. PAROLE HEARING ON SEPTEMBER 15, 2020**

Randy Williams, now 47-years-old, appeared before the Parole Board for a review hearing on September 15, 2020, and was represented by Attorney Justin Dreschler. Mr. Williams was denied parole in 2012, after his initial hearing. In 2017, he postponed his review hearing. In Mr. Williams' opening statement to the Board, he apologized to Ms. Gardner's family. He expressed his remorse for the crime and characterized his actions as "senseless" and "horrific." At his initial hearing, Mr. Williams failed to take responsibility for his role in Ms. Gardner's murder. At this hearing, Mr. Williams admitted to minimizing his part in the crime and said that he had been ashamed and could not "accept reality." He has now accepted full responsibility and regrets not having done so sooner. In addition, Mr. Williams assured the Board that he is committed to rehabilitation, stating that his programming efforts have helped him "become a better person."

Mr. Williams told Board Members that, at the time of the governing offense, he was on a "path of destruction." He had lost contact with his family, suffered from both mental health and substance abuse problems, and was homeless. When questioned as to the details leading up to the murder of Ms. Gardner, Mr. Williams stated that he knew there was a conflict between Ms. Fernandes and Ms. Gardner, a fact that he denied at his initial hearing. Prior to the crime, Ms. Gardner had accused Mr. Williams and his co-defendants of holding her hostage in an abandoned trailer. This accusation aggravated Ms. Fernandes and was the reason they went looking for Ms. Gardner that night. Upon further questioning, Mr. Williams stated that, while he was not aware that the altercation would escalate to such a level, he was aware that Ms. Fernandes planned to assault Ms. Gardner. In addition to being present for the entire attack, Mr. Williams admitted to "punching" Ms. Gardner and aiding his co-defendants in covering up the murder, factors he previously denied. When asked about the impact Ms. Gardner's murder likely had on her family, Mr. Williams told Board Members that he "broke their heart" and understood that his apology will not "heal their heartache."

When Board Members inquired as to his mental health, Mr. Williams admitted that he had been "declining" and feeling suicidal after his last hearing. As such, he was transferred to Bridgewater State Hospital to receive treatment, where he was diagnosed with depression and a mood disorder. Mr. Williams recalled feeling disappointed after his last hearing because he "killed someone and didn't learn anything." He views his time at the Treatment Center as a "wake-up call" because he was given an opportunity to finally "do something good." When Board Members inquired as to what he learned from treatment, Mr. Williams responded that he "accepted that he couldn't change reality," and so, he took responsibility for his actions. Moreover, Mr. Williams apologized to the Board for lying at his last hearing. He was "ashamed" and admitted that (at the time) he "couldn't look at [himself.]" Board Members asked whether he thought childhood trauma played a role in Ms. Gardner's murder, as he was "abandoned" by his father at a young

age. Mr. Williams believes that it may have contributed to his anger issues, but explained that the choices he made as an adult were his own.

When Board Members questioned Mr. Williams about his substance abuse history, he admitted that it was a significant factor in the governing offense. At the time, however, he was not aware, or willing to admit, that his addiction was a problem. While Mr. Williams believes that his addiction is now "under control," he remains in treatment and committed to his sobriety. Additionally, Mr. Williams told the Board that he is working on managing his triggers despite being sober for 9 years. Mr. Williams shared that, recently, the smell of gasoline reminded him of drinking at a bar. However, he was able to utilize his skills to control himself. Mr. Williams has consistently participated in AA/NA, or some other form of addiction therapy, for approximately 8 years.

Mr. Williams spoke about his programming efforts prior to his 2012 hearing, admitting that he had not been involved in any meaningful programs as he had a "chip on his shoulder." Since then, he has been committed to counseling and programming, which has helped him change the way he thinks. Mr. Williams explained that, previously, he responded with anger and acted impulsively. Now, he can "put things in perspective." When Board Members inquired as to whether he can discuss the level of violence in Ms. Gardner's murder, Mr. Williams admitted that he still struggles with the details. He is working on this issue with his clinician, but those conversations are "extremely tough" because he can't "go back and fix it." The Board commended Mr. Williams on the number of programs that he has completed.

The Board considered testimony in support of parole from Mr. Williams' sister and friend. The Board also considered the testimony and evaluation of Dr. DiCataldo. The Board considered testimony in opposition to parole from Middlesex Assistant District Attorney Marisa Tagliareni.

### **III. DECISION**

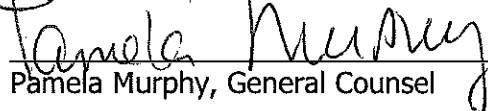
The Board is of the opinion that Randy Williams has not demonstrated a level of rehabilitative progress that would make his release compatible with the welfare of society. Mr. Williams is currently incarcerated for the kidnapping, torturing, and murder of 19-year-old Helena Gardner with his co-defendants on March 25, 1997. Mr. Williams admitted his criminal culpability at his hearing in September of 2020. Mr. Williams recognized that he had a chip on his shoulder for the first 15 years of incarceration. It was after his last appearance before the Board in 2012, that he realized he needed to address his causative factors to include mental health, addiction, and anger. Although he has made strides in his rehabilitation, the Board is of the opinion that he needs to further address those areas. The Board did consider testimony from Dr. DiCataldo, who highlighted [that] if Mr. Williams is to be paroled, he needs to remain vigilant in the area of mental health compliance, sobriety, and associations.

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. Williams' 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. Williams' risk of recidivism.

After applying this standard to the circumstances of Mr. Williams' case, the Board is of the opinion that Randy Williams is not rehabilitated and, therefore, does not merit parole at this time.

Mr. Williams' next appearance before the Board will take place in two years from the date of this hearing. During the interim, the Board encourages Mr. Williams to continue working toward 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

5/20/2021  
Date