

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



**PAROLE BOARD**

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**RECORD OF DECISION**

**IN THE MATTER OF**

**ROBERT CANTELL**  
**W36380**

**TYPE OF HEARING:** Review Hearing

**DATE OF HEARING:** May 7, 2025

**DATE OF DECISION:** October 7, 2025

**PARTICIPATING BOARD MEMBERS:** Edith J. Alexander, Dr. Charlene Bonner, Tonomey Coleman, Sarah B. Coughlin, James Kelcourse, Rafael Ortiz

**VOTE:** Parole is denied with a review 3 years from the date of the hearing.<sup>1</sup>

**PROCEDURAL HISTORY:** On December 2, 1977, after a jury trial in Bristol Superior Court, Robert Cantell was found guilty of rape and received a sentence of life in prison with the possibility of parole. On that same date, Mr. Cantell was found guilty of kidnapping and received an 8 to 10 year sentence to run from and after his life sentence. In addition, Mr. Cantell was found guilty of armed burglary for which he was sentenced to 10 to 12 years, assault by means of a dangerous weapon for which he was sentenced to 3 to 5 years, and engaging in unnatural acts for which he was sentenced to 3 to 5 years. All sentences were ordered to run concurrently with his life sentence. In 1978, Mr. Cantell's convictions were affirmed. Parole was denied following an initial hearing in 1992, and after review hearings in 1993, 1994, 1997, 2003, and 2006. After a review hearing in 2010, Mr. Cantell was granted parole and released; however, his parole was revoked approximately five months later.<sup>2</sup> Subsequently, Mr. Cantell was denied parole after his review hearings in 2015 and 2021.

On May 7, 2025, Mr. Cantell appeared before the Board for a review hearing. He was represented by Harvard Prison Legal Assistant Project student attorney Leah Smith and Yesha Shah under the

<sup>1</sup> Two Board Members voted to deny parole with a review 4 years from the date of the hearing.

<sup>2</sup> On February 24, 2011, Mr. Cantell was arrested on a parole violation warrant for possessing a four-inch knife, as well as magazines containing provocative and revealing pictures of women.

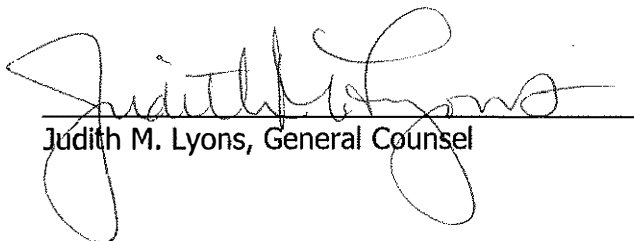
supervision of supervising Attorney John D. Fitzpatrick. The Board's decision fully incorporates by reference the entire video recording of Mr. Cantell's May 7, 2025, hearing.

**STATEMENT OF THE CASE:** On April 2, 1977, Robert Cantell, aged 20, broke into a nursing home in New Bedford at approximately 3:00 am. He forcibly abducted a female nurse at knifepoint and then drove her to an isolated area. After forcing her to dance in the nude and to repeat obscenities, Mr. Cantell proceeded to rape and sodomize the victim. Afterwards, he abandoned her.

**APPLICABLE STANDARD:** Parole "[p]ermits shall be granted only if the Board is of the opinion, after consideration of a risk and needs assessment, that there is a reasonable probability that, if the prisoner is released with appropriate conditions and community supervision, the prisoner will live and remain at liberty without violating the law and that release is not incompatible with the welfare of society." M.G.L. c. 127, § 130. In making this determination, the Board takes into consideration an inmate's institutional behavior, their participation in available work, educational, and treatment programs during the period of incarceration, and whether risk reduction programs could effectively minimize the inmate's risk of recidivism. M.G.L. c. 127, § 130. The Board also considers all relevant facts, including the nature of the underlying offense, the age of the inmate at the time of the offense, the criminal record, the institutional record, the inmate's testimony at the hearing, and the views of the public as expressed at the hearing and/or in written submissions to the Board. (if applicable).

**DECISION OF THE BOARD:** Mr. Cantell needs to continue his rehabilitative efforts. Since his last hearing, he has incurred nine disciplinary reports, including 3 for possession of pornographic materials. He has been in Sex Offender Treatment Program (SOTP) Maintenance Group, but otherwise has completed minimal programming. He lacks insight into his behaviors and, in particular, his sexually motivated behaviors. The Board concludes that Robert Cantell has not demonstrated a level of rehabilitation that would make his release compatible with the welfare of society. The Board considered public testimony from Mr. Cantell's friend in support of parole. The Board heard testimony from Bristol County Assistant District Attorney Jose Vasquez in opposition to parole.

*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.*

  
Judith M. Lyons, General Counsel

10/7/25  
Date