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PAROLE BOARD

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Paul M. Treseler
Chairperson

Michael J. Callahan
Executive Director

DECISION

**IN THE MATTER OF
ROBERT LITTLES**

W51448

TYPE OF HEARING: Review Hearing

DATE OF HEARING: May 23, 2017

DATE OF DECISION: March 26, 2018

PARTICIPATING BOARD MEMBERS: Paul M. Treseler, Dr. Charlene Bonner, Tonomey Coleman, Sheila Dupre, Tina Hurley, Lucy Soto-Abbe

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 hearing scheduled in one year from the date of the hearing.

I. STATEMENT OF THE CASE

On November 7, 1991, in Suffolk Superior Court, Robert Littles pleaded guilty to the second degree murder of Calvin Reese and was sentenced to serve life in prison with the possibility of parole.

On November 20, 1990, Mr. Littles and some friends attended a party at a Roxbury night club. Mr. Littles was a member of a gang from New York that was based in the Orchard Park housing project in Roxbury. Calvin Reese was a member of a rival gang. When Mr. Littles and his co-defendants saw Mr. Reese in the night club, they devised a plan to kill him. One co-defendant started a fight as a distraction. Mr. Littles, armed with a .38 caliber pistol, then

¹ The Parole Board's decision was split. Three Board Members voted to deny parole with a review hearing in three years from the date of the hearing. Three Board Members voted to reserve parole to a Long Term Residential Treatment Program after two years, with at least one year in lower custody.

approached Mr. Reese from behind and shot him in the back of the head. Mr. Littles was 17-years-old at the time of the murder.

II. PAROLE HEARING ON MAY 23, 2017

Mr. Littles, now 44-years-old, appeared before the Parole Board on May 23, 2017, for a review hearing and was represented by Attorney Amy Belger. Mr. Littles was denied parole after his initial hearing in 2005. In his opening statement, Mr. Littles apologized to the family of Calvin Reese. He expressed his remorse and took responsibility for the murder of Mr. Reese. Mr. Littles also apologized for not being honest at his last hearing in 2005. Mr. Littles stated that he lied about the underlying offense, as well as his gang affiliation, substance abuse, criminal history, and institutional record. In 2010, Mr. Littles was eligible to appear before the Board for another review hearing, but chose to postpone because he was "not ready to be open and honest." He said that he had more work to do towards his rehabilitation. Mr. Littles stated that since his last hearing, he has engaged in programming in order to prepare himself for parole.

In describing his background, Mr. Littles indicated that he underwent a number of traumatic events beginning at age 4, which eventually lead him astray. He took refuge in a gang at age 16, instead of turning to his own family. He stated that he began smoking marijuana and hashish at a very young age in order to "fit in with other guys." Eventually, he began using drugs and drinking alcohol on a daily basis. He became involved with a New York gang and was brought to Massachusetts by a fellow gang member. After a couple of months, he returned to New York and was arrested. He was incarcerated at Rikers Island Prison on several occasions, while in New York. At some point, he returned to Massachusetts and became involved in selling drugs. Mr. Littles stated that he began carrying a firearm at around age 15 and had used it to shoot at other people on at least four occasions. He said that he did not strike anyone until the governing offense. Mr. Littles indicated that his birth name is Armand Coleman, and that he assumed the alias of Robert Littles when he came to Massachusetts in connection with his criminal activity.

In addressing his prior dishonesty with the Board, Mr. Littles stated that he was holding on to his "criminal reputation" and that he did not know the difference between "snitching" and giving a full account of what transpired. Mr. Littles stated that on the night of the murder, he was at a party at a night club in Roxbury, where there were members of different gangs present. He was there for a couple of hours drinking and smoking marijuana. At around 1:00 a.m., he and his codefendant Kevin Kempt stepped outside. Mr. Kempt told Mr. Littles that on a prior occasion, Mr. Reese was approached by a member of the New York gang, and an argument ensued between the two. Mr. Reese did not back down, even though the New York gang was the "alpha gang." As a result of that incident, Mr. Kempt and Mr. Littles planned to shoot Mr. Reese. Mr. Kempt started a fight as a distraction, while Mr. Littles shot Mr. Reese in the back of the head. Mr. Littles explained that no one told him to commit the murder; he and Mr. Kempt had planned it within two or three minutes. At the time, Mr. Littles stated that he felt proud about what he had done. Mr. Littles began to feel remorse, and view his actions differently, when he received a letter from his mother describing the hopes and dreams that she previously had for him. The hurt he caused his mother changed his perspective about the crime.

Mr. Littles had a poor institutional adjustment throughout a large portion of his incarceration. He has accrued approximately 138 disciplinary reports, partly due to his issues with authority. Mr. Littles also admitted to being a poor influence on other inmates, including his advocating for the (1993) murder of inmate Curtis Johnson. Mr. Littles' behavior improved around 2010, while incarcerated at Souza-Baranowski Correctional Center. During that time, Mr. Littles began to mature and view his actions from a different perspective. In 2013, he was reclassified and transferred to MCI-Norfolk. In addition to earning his GED and completing a course in welding and for a commercial driver's license, Mr. Littles participated in many programs, including the Correctional Recovery Academy, Restorative Justice, Emotional Awareness, and Jericho Circle.

The Board considered the testimony of Dr. Hilary Ziven (who performed a psychological evaluation of Mr. Littles), as well as Chuck Dickinson, Kenneth Cash, and Kimberly Yeasir (of the THRIVE Program), all of whom expressed support for Mr. Littles' release. The Board considered testimony of Mr. Reece's mother and aunt, both of whom expressed opposition to parole. Mr. Reece's aunt also read a statement opposing parole that was written by Mr. Reese's uncle, who could not attend the hearing. The Board considered written submissions of the Boston Police Commissioner and the Suffolk County District Attorney's Office in opposition to parole.

III. DECISION

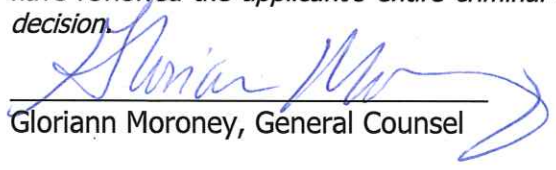
Although progress has been made, the Board is of the opinion that Robert Littles has not yet demonstrated a level of rehabilitative progress that would make his release compatible with the welfare of society. The Board believes that a longer period of positive institutional adjustment and programming would be beneficial to Mr. Littles' rehabilitation.

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 the context of an offender convicted of first or second degree murder, who was a juvenile at the time the offense was committed, the Board takes into consideration the attributes of youth that distinguish juvenile homicide offenders from similarly situated adult offenders. Consideration of these factors ensures that the parole candidate, who was a juvenile at the time they committed murder, has "a real chance to demonstrate maturity and rehabilitation." *Diatchenko v. District Attorney for the Suffolk District*, 471 Mass. 12, 30 (2015); See also *Commonwealth v. Okoro*, 471 Mass. 51 (2015).

The factors considered by the Board include the offender's "lack of maturity and an underdeveloped sense of responsibility, leading to recklessness, impulsivity, and heedless risk-taking; vulnerability to negative influences and outside pressures, including from their family and peers; limited control over their own environment; lack of the ability to extricate themselves from horrific, crime-producing settings; and unique capacity to change as they grow older." *Id.* The Board has also considered whether risk reduction programs could effectively minimize Mr. Littles' risk of recidivism. After applying this standard to the circumstances of Mr. Littles' case, the Board is of the opinion that Robert Littles is not yet rehabilitated, and his release is not compatible with the welfare of society. Mr. Littles, therefore, does not merit parole at this time.

Mr. Littles' next appearance before the Board will take place in one year from the date of this hearing.

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.


Gloriann Moroney, General Counsel

3/26/18
Date