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DECISION

IN THE MATTER OF

ROBERT SORENSEN
W46536

TYPE OF HEARING: **Review Hearing after Revocation**

DATE OF HEARING: **February 18, 2016**

DATE OF DECISION: **July 26, 2016**

PARTICIPATING BOARD MEMBERS: Paul M. Treseler, Dr. Charlene Bonner, Tonomey Coleman, Sheila Dupre, Ina Howard-Hogan, 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. Parole is denied with a review scheduled in two years from the date of the hearing.¹

I. STATEMENT OF THE CASE

On May 23, 1989, in Norfolk County Superior Court, Robert Sorensen pled guilty to the second degree murder of Patricia Wolffe Bonito. A sentence of life in prison with the possibility of parole was imposed on Mr. Sorensen for the murder of Ms. Wolffe Bonito.

At around 10:00 p.m. on June 17, 1988, Mr. Sorensen left the apartment that he shared with his girlfriend, Ms. Wolffe Bonito, and headed to his job as a doughnut maker in Brockton. While at work, Mr. Sorensen purchased a gram of crack cocaine and smoked it. He left work to purchase more crack cocaine, and then returned to the doughnut shop and smoked it. Mr. Sorensen called Ms. Wolffe Bonito to tell her that he was not feeling well and was going to come home. At around 2:00 a.m. on June 18, Mr. Sorensen left the doughnut shop. When he arrived home, he and Ms. Wolffe Bonito got into an argument over his cocaine use. After the

¹ Four of the seven Members of the Parole Board voted to schedule a review hearing on Mr. Sorensen's petition for parole in two years. One Board Member voted to schedule a review hearing in four years. Two Members of the Board voted to reserve with conditions.

argument, Mr. Sorensen then went downstairs to smoke more crack cocaine. Mr. Sorensen eventually got a kitchen knife and stabbed Ms. Wolfe Bonito. She died from a single stab wound to the abdomen. Mr. Sorensen then smoked more cocaine and contemplated suicide.

At approximately 3:45 a.m., Canton police received a call from Mr. Sorensen, stating that he had just killed Ms. Wolfe Bonito. When the officer asked who was calling, Mr. Sorensen stated, "Robert Sorensen, and I just murdered her. Please just get there before the kids get up and find her. I don't want them to find her like that." Ms. Wolfe Bonito's two young children, and another child who lived in the neighborhood, were asleep in the home at the time of the murder. The officer asked Mr. Sorensen where he was. Mr. Sorensen replied that he was in the parking lot of a gas station, near a pharmacy. When asked where the victim was, Mr. Sorensen told him that she was in a house on Pequit Street, but was unsure of the exact address. When an officer arrived at the gas station, Mr. Sorensen attempted to give him better directions to Ms. Wolfe Bonito's home. Mr. Sorensen was then placed under arrest and brought to the police station.

II. PAROLE HEARING ON FEBRUARY 18, 2016

Mr. Sorensen's initial hearing before the Parole Board took place on May 1, 2003, and resulted in the denial of parole. His review hearing, on May 16, 2006, also resulted in the denial of parole. Mr. Sorensen received a positive parole vote in May 2009, and was released from prison in 2010. In 2011, however, the Board revoked Mr. Sorensen's parole based on violations for irresponsible conduct and for associating with someone who had a criminal record. After his review hearing on April 3, 2012, he received a positive vote. He was re-paroled in 2013 (with special conditions), after having served one year in a lower security facility. Mr. Sorensen was then returned to custody in 2015 for multiple parole violations, including irresponsible conduct, failure to pay a supervision fee, and failure to abstain from liquor.

Mr. Sorensen, now 58-years-old, appeared before the Parole Board on February 18, 2016, for his first review hearing since his 2015 parole revocation. He was represented by Attorney John Rull. In his opening statement to the Board, Mr. Sorensen expressed his remorse and sadness for the victim and her family, and emphasized his commitment to sobriety and to Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) programming. Mr. Sorensen addressed the incidents that led to his most recent re-incarceration. On the day that Mr. Sorensen had contact with the Jaffrey (New Hampshire) police, his girlfriend had learned that she was going to need another brain surgery. Mr. Sorensen stated that while he was at work, and "unbeknownst" to him, his girlfriend was at her home drinking alcohol. Later that day, Mr. Sorensen's parole officer stopped by his home to visit, and then Mr. Sorensen and his girlfriend took a motorcycle ride to New Hampshire. Mr. Sorensen's girlfriend needed to use the restroom, so they stopped at a bar/restaurant where the incident occurred. Mr. Sorensen admitted that he went into the bar/restaurant briefly, but maintains that he did not consume any alcohol, as he has been sober for 27 years.

When Mr. Sorensen's girlfriend came out of the bar/restaurant, she was "animated" and "highly upset" that she would need another brain surgery. Mr. Sorensen believes that someone thought it looked as though he was becoming violent toward his girlfriend, so that individual called the police. Mr. Sorensen does not understand why the caller would tell police that a woman's head was being slammed into a motorcycle, and stated that this description was a "misinterpretation" of what was taking place. He said that he was attempting to comfort his

girlfriend, as she was very upset about her health issues. Shortly thereafter, two police officers arrived. Mr. Sorensen stated that he and his girlfriend were kissing when the police arrived. Mr. Sorensen's girlfriend told police that nothing bad had happened. After one of the officers determined that an altercation was not taking place, he allowed Mr. Sorensen and his girlfriend to get on Mr. Sorensen's motorcycle and ride away. The officer, however, did make a note of the fact that Mr. Sorensen's breath smelled slightly of alcohol. Mr. Sorensen believes that the odor was transferred to his mouth when he was kissing his girlfriend. Mr. Sorensen claims that he learned from this experience that he cannot be around people who use alcohol and that he must be more vigilant, even around people who are in AA. He realizes that he is held to a "very high standard," given the fact that he is on parole for a life sentence.

Throughout the hearing, the Board expressed concerns regarding Mr. Sorensen's pattern of unhealthy and destructive relationships with women, beginning with the murder of Ms. Wolfe Bonito in the home where her children slept. When asked what led to his first return to custody after being paroled, Mr. Sorensen acknowledged that while he was married, he had inappropriate contact with a woman he knew from AA. His parole officer had witnessed Mr. Sorensen and this woman kissing. Mr. Sorensen claimed that he and this woman were not having an affair, but admitted that since he was a married man, he should not have taken her on his motorcycle. The Board questioned Mr. Sorensen as to why he would then become involved with his present girlfriend (who Mr. Sorensen met through AA), after having already been returned to custody while on parole due to issues with women. Mr. Sorensen stated that his girlfriend had been sober for a year, and that he had obtained his parole officer's approval of the relationship. Mr. Sorensen maintains that he did not know his girlfriend had been drinking that day. Although Mr. Sorensen and this woman are no longer in a relationship, due to her own struggle with sobriety, they remain friends.

The Board also questioned whether Mr. Sorensen entered into relationships with women who were vulnerable to manipulation. Mr. Sorensen acknowledged that his ex-wife had contributed money towards his business while they were married, but said he put a lot of his own money into the venture, as well. Mr. Sorensen stated that his ex-wife was present at the hearing and that they still love one another. He understands how his wife's financial contribution to his business could be perceived as manipulation, but he does not believe that he manipulated his ex-wife, or any of the other women with whom he had relationships. Mr. Sorensen conveyed to the Board that he never intended to exploit women and only wished to be in a loving relationship and to help others. Although he and his ex-girlfriend had a good relationship, Mr. Sorensen said that he is open to returning to counseling to address his relationship issues with women. He also plans to refrain from getting romantically involved with women who are in AA. Since returning to prison, Mr. Sorensen maintained a positive custody record. He is active in AA and Narcotics Anonymous (NA), participates in bible study, and attends religious services. Mr. Sorensen also volunteers his time doing art work in the institution and assists as a welding instructor. He has taken all of the other programs offered at the institution.

The Board considered the testimony of Mr. Sorensen's ex-wife, a friend, and three AA community members, all of whom expressed support for his release. The Board received letters in support of Mr. Sorensen from members of the AA community. The Board considered the testimony of Norfolk County District Attorney Michael Morrissey, Norfolk County Assistant

District Attorney Marguerite Grant, Canton Police Chief Kenneth Berkowitz, and the victim's niece, all of whom spoke in opposition to Mr. Sorensen's parole.

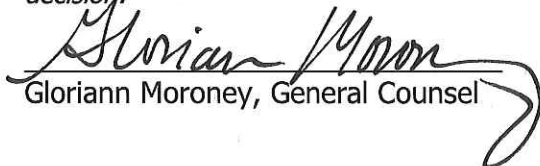
III. DECISION

The Board is of the opinion that Mr. Sorensen has not demonstrated a level of rehabilitative progress that would make his release compatible with the welfare of society. The Board believes a longer period of positive institutional adjustment and programming would be beneficial to Mr. Sorensen's 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 forming this opinion, the Board has taken into consideration Mr. Sorensen's 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. Sorensen's risk of recidivism. After applying this standard to the circumstances of Mr. Sorensen's case, the Board is of the opinion that Mr. Sorensen is not yet rehabilitated and, therefore, does not merit parole at this time.

Mr. Sorensen'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. Sorensen 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.


Gloriann Moroney, General Counsel

7/26/16
Date