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*The Commonwealth of Massachusetts*  
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**PAROLE BOARD**

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Executive Director

**DECISION**

**IN THE MATTER OF**

**SERGIO RENTA**

**W63944**

**TYPE OF HEARING: REVIEW HEARING**

**DATE OF HEARING: DECEMBER 9, 2014**

**DATE OF DECISION: JANUARY 26, 2015**

**PARTICIPATING BOARD MEMBERS:** 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, 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 Sergio Renta is a suitable candidate for parole. Parole is granted to a long term residential treatment program after six months in lower security at the Department of Correction (DOC), during which time Renta must maintain good conduct and comply with all DOC expectations for programs, activities, and employment.

**I. STATEMENT OF THE CASE**

On January 15, 1998, in Essex Superior Court, Sergio Renta pleaded guilty to murder in the second degree and was sentenced to life imprisonment.

On November 29, 1996, Sergio Renta, age 19, approached Franklin Joseph on Elm Street in Lawrence. When Renta pulled out a gun, Mr. Joseph turned to run. Renta fired three shots at Mr. Joseph and hit him twice in the back. Renta fled the area and was subsequently apprehended in Newburyport on December 2, 1996. Three spent shell casings were recovered at the scene.

## **II. PAROLE HEARING ON DECEMBER 9, 2014**

Sergio Renta appeared for his review parole hearing, after being denied in December 2011 and given a three year review date. He did not have legal representation. He is 37 years old and has served 18 years of his life sentence. Since his initial hearing, Renta has completed Alternatives to Violence (for Trainers) Program, Emotional Awareness, and Active Listening Skills. He attends Big Book, AA/NA, religious services, and participates in a music program. Renta works as a janitor in the Administration Building at MCI-Norfolk and has maintained positive institutional behavior throughout his incarceration.

Renta spoke about the effect his investment in programming has had on his thinking, goals, and behavior. Renta was born in Pawtucket, Rhode Island and described his upbringing as "dysfunctional." He said that, at age 14, he witnessed a murder which took place in his home. This event had a profound effect on him and was the main reason he became a "walking time bomb." He kept his emotions and insecurities to himself and said, "I felt I wasn't processing all the events I had seen, I never dealt with everything and continued to bury my emotions." At age 17, he was hospitalized for psychiatric treatment following a violent confrontation with his brother when he chased him with a knife. He said that he had "racing thoughts" and "heard voices" at that time, but has not experienced such symptoms since that incident. Upon release from the hospital, Renta went back to live with his mother. He began to "skip school, hanging out, and was arrested for stealing cars." He dropped out of school in tenth grade and, by that time, he was an active drug user and dealer. Renta smoked marijuana and drank beer and used cocaine, mescaline, and heroin. This was part of his lifestyle at that time; however since being incarcerated, Renta has committed himself to abstinence and has remained drug and alcohol free throughout his incarceration. Renta has primarily relied on his faith for support. He currently attends counseling with his chaplain, where he receives guidance on daily issues that he may be struggling with, as well as how best to live a life that reflects his faith.

The Parole Board questioned Renta regarding his motive for such a violent and senseless act. Renta again described his lifestyle at that time and admitted he lacked any direction, guidance, or appreciation for life. In describing the details, he stated that it was an average day; he was not working or going to school. He stated, "I used cocaine and weed all day. I went to hang out at the corner store and hung out with Papito, playing at the arcade. A group of friends of Papito came in with the victim, Franklin Joseph. A fight occurred between Papito and Franklin. I cheered on Papito in the fight and laughed. Franklin came around the corner with a butcher knife and went after my brother Felix." After this incident, Renta went home with Felix, retrieved his gun, and then shot Franklin twice in the back. Afterwards, he went to his friend's home in Newburyport. He was apprehended on December 2, 1996. Renta expressed remorse and understanding for how his actions affected so many others. Renta insisted that his views are very different now and that he has invested in positive change.

Although the Department of Correction lists Renta as a validated member of a gang and, in fact, gang paraphernalia was found in his room by police after executing a search warrant, Renta denies any membership. At the hearing, he admitted to associating with known gang members, but denies ever having sworn loyalty to a gang. He stated that although his friend Papito was a gang member, their friendship continued. Renta said that he sold drugs on his own and not as part of gang activity. Despite his insistence that he was not part of a gang, he

began the process of gang renouncement through the Department of Corrections after his initial parole hearing and said "I thought it was necessary to do it." Renta wanted to clear his name of any gang affiliation.

Renta stated that his parole plan includes residing at Opening Heaven's Door Ministries residential program, seeking employment as a welder or carpenter, attending AA/NA, and continuing with faith based services and counseling to help him readjust to society. Upon successful completion of a long term residential treatment program, he will obtain his own apartment and will rely on his family and faith for emotional support.

Numerous family members and friends appeared in support of his petition for parole. Two people spoke assuring the Parole Board that Renta will have the necessary supports upon his release to be successful. Essex County Assistant District Attorney Elin Graydon provided a letter in opposition to parole and outlined the reasons for opposition at the hearing. The victim's mother was unable to attend the hearing, but conveyed her opposition to Renta's release.

### **III. DECISION**

Sergio Renta was 19 years old when he committed the offense for which he is incarcerated. At the time of the murder, he engaged in a lifestyle of crime and high risk behaviors, including his association with gang members and substance abuse. During his 18 years of incarceration, he has made significant strides toward rehabilitation by engaging in multiple programs, maintaining positive institutional behavior, and continuing institutional employment. Renta has established a strong support network in the community and has made meaningful progress with regard to his criminal thinking, mental health, and substance abuse issues. He was forthcoming about his criminal conduct and his lack of appreciation and respect for the welfare of others. Renta has demonstrated a commitment to change. The Board is of the opinion that Renta has demonstrated rehabilitative progress and presents no current risk for violence and that supervised release is not incompatible with the welfare of society.

The standard we apply in assessing candidates for parole is set out in 120 C.M.R.300.04, which provides that "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." Applying the appropriately high standard here, it is the unanimous opinion of the Board that Sergio Renta merits parole at this time because he is rehabilitated. Renta will be expected to comply with all conditions of parole.

**ADDITIONAL SPECIAL CONDIITONS:** Parole after six months in lower security to a long term residential treatment program; Must attend mental health counseling for adjustment and transition issues; Attend AA or NA at least three times per week; Obtain a sponsor.

*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.*

  
Janis DiLoreto Smith, Executive Director

  
Date