



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Public Safety and Security



PAROLE BOARD

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DECISION

IN THE MATTER OF

STEVEN WOODWORTH

W52204

TYPE OF HEARING: Review Hearing

DATE OF HEARING: June 10, 2021

DATE OF DECISION: March 9, 2022

PARTICIPATING BOARD MEMBERS: Gloriann Moroney, Dr. Charlene Bonner, Tonomey Coleman, Sheila Dupre, Tina Hurley, 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 by unanimous vote that the inmate is not a suitable candidate for parole. Parole is denied with a review scheduled in three years from the date of the hearing.

I. STATEMENT OF THE CASE

On March 19, 1992, in Bristol Superior Court, Steven Woodworth pleaded guilty to the second-degree murder of Julie Harlow and was sentenced to life in prison with the possibility of parole.

On March 21, 1991, Steven Woodworth (age 25) murdered his 22-year-old girlfriend, Julie Harlow, by shooting her multiple times. Earlier in the day, Ms. Harlow had informed Mr. Woodworth that she was ending their relationship. Unwilling to accept that, Mr. Woodworth convinced Ms. Harlow to drive with him in his truck to discuss matters. After he picked her up at around 9 p.m. in Whitman, they drove around discussing their relationship. Mr. Woodworth could not convince Ms. Harlow to change her mind about ending their relationship. So, as they were seated in the cab of his truck, he shot her numerous times using a .22 caliber pistol.

After shooting Ms. Harlow, Mr. Woodworth drove around southeastern Massachusetts for hours with her body still next to him in the truck. He ended up at his parents' house in Easton at around 5:30 a.m., where he parked his truck in the driveway. In an attempt to take his own life, Mr. Woodworth drank paint thinner and shot himself once in the chest. When Mr. Woodworth's father heard the gunshot, he came outside to investigate. Upon seeing both his son and the victim in the truck, he called the police. Ms. Harlow was pronounced dead at the scene. Mr. Woodworth was taken to a nearby hospital, where he recovered from his injuries.

II. PAROLE HEARING ON JUNE 10, 2021

Steven Woodworth, now 56-years-old, appeared before the Parole Board for a review hearing on June 10, 2021. Mr. Woodworth was represented by Attorney Justin Dreschler. This was Mr. Woodworth's fifth appearance before the Board. Parole was denied after his initial hearing in 2006, and after his review hearings in 2011, 2015, and 2018. In his opening statement to the Board, Mr. Woodworth acknowledged that his crime was one of domestic violence and apologized to the family of Julie Harlow for taking her life. Mr. Woodworth described how being put up for adoption by his birth mother left him with a fear of abandonment that caused him to be "clingy," possessive, and controlling in his relationships. Although he denied being physically abusive, Mr. Woodworth recognized that his possessive and controlling behavior was emotionally and psychologically abusive, nonetheless.

When questioned as to the governing offense, Mr. Woodworth said that he understood that Ms. Harlow was ending the relationship when she told him, "I can't do this anymore." He described how his anger, resentment, and feeling of abandonment built up to his decision that "if I can't have her, no one else can either." He told the Board that about an hour before the murder, he had decided, "I am going to kill Julie." Mr. Woodworth described putting his gun under the seat in his truck, convincing Ms. Harlow to go for a ride, and then shooting her. Mr. Woodworth denied, however, planning a murder-suicide at the outset of his crime. After he saw what he had done, he "couldn't take it" and tried to end his own life.

When the Board discussed his transfer from MCI-Shirley to Old Colony Correction Center, Mr. Woodworth explained that his mental health counselors thought he needed more intensive therapy. He described how he had recently lost his job at the prison after being disciplined for taking a culinary meal. Mr. Woodworth claimed that he experienced increased anxiety and obsessive thoughts over this incident, which led to a brief psychotic episode immediately after the transfer to Old Colony. Mr. Woodworth believed that stress from losing his job, his mental health counselors, and his friends at his former prison, combined with not knowing anyone at Old Colony, also contributed to his psychotic break. A Board Member asked Mr. Woodworth whether there was a correlation between his need to see a mental health counselor every week and his self-described "clinginess" in his romantic relationships. Mr. Woodworth responded that he had built a habit of seeing mental health counselors over the years, but that he was not upset if he missed a week. The Board noted Mr. Woodworth's programming efforts.

Mr. Woodworth's sister, brother-in-law, nephew, and cousin all testified in support of parole. The Board also considered a psychiatric forensic report prepared by Dr. Frank DiCataldo.

Ms. Harlow's mother, brother, and two nieces testified in opposition to parole. Bristol County Assistant District Attorney Courtney Cahill also testified in opposition to parole.

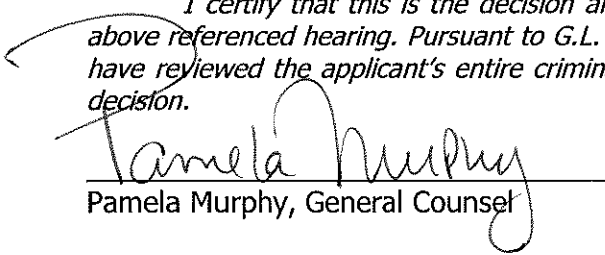
III. DECISION

The Board is of the opinion that Steven Woodworth has not demonstrated a level of rehabilitative progress that would make his release compatible with the welfare of society. Mr. Woodworth has been incarcerated for approximately 30 years for the murder of Julie Harlow. Mr. Woodworth murdered his girlfriend while she was attempting to end the relationship. The Board has concerns that subject continues a pattern of destabilization in relation to codependency issues. Subject was recently psychiatrically restabilized within the R.T.U. (Residential Treatment Unit). The Board agrees with the expert opinion of Dr. Frank DiCataldo that subject would benefit from completion of R.T.U. He should continue his treatment within the R.T.U. therapeutic program and maintain compliance with all medication.

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 an 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. Woodworth's institutional behavior, as well as his participation in available work, educational, and treatment programs during the period of his incarceration. The Board also considered a risk and needs assessment, and whether risk reduction programs could effectively minimize Mr. Woodworth's risk of recidivism. After applying this standard to the circumstances of Mr. Woodworth's case, the Board is of the unanimous opinion that Steven Woodworth is not yet rehabilitated and, therefore, does not merit parole at this time.

Mr. Woodworth's next appearance before the Board will take place in three years from the date of this hearing. During the interim, the Board encourages Mr. Woodworth 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.


Pamela Murphy, General Counsel

3/9/2022
Date