

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Public Safety and Security

PAROLE BOARD

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RECORD OF DECISION

IN THE MATTER OF

VAN GUSTAVE
W89072

TYPE OF HEARING: **Review Hearing**

DATE OF HEARING: **July 29, 2025**

DATE OF DECISION: **January 13, 2026**

PARTICIPATING BOARD MEMBERS: Edith J. Alexander, Dr. Charlene Bonner, Sarah B. Coughlin, Angelo Gomez Jr., James Kelcourse¹

VOTE: Parole is granted to a Long-Term Residential Program after one year total in lower security.²

PROCEDURAL HISTORY: On January 18, 2007, in Middlesex County Superior Court, Van Gustave pleaded guilty to murder in the second-degree for the death of Ryan Sullivan. He was sentenced to life in prison with the possibility of parole. On that same date, he also pleaded guilty to two counts of Armed Assault with Intent to Murder and received concurrent sentences of 10 to 12 years and 7 to 8 years, respectively, one count of Assault and Battery by Means of a Dangerous Weapon Causing Serious Bodily Injury and received a concurrent sentence of 10 to 12 years, and one count of Assault and Battery by Means of a Dangerous Weapon and received a concurrent sentence of 7 to 8 years. Parole was denied following an initial hearing in 2019 and after a review hearing in 2023.

On July 29, 2025, Mr. Gustave appeared before the Board for a review hearing. He was represented by Attorney Kim Jones. The Board's decision fully incorporates by reference the entire video recording of Mr. Gustave's July 29, 2025, hearing.

¹ Former Acting Chair Coleman was present for the hearing but departed the Board prior to the decision in this matter. Board Member Ortiz was not present at the hearing. The Chair deemed Board Member Ortiz unavailable for the vote on this matter because, due to a malfunction in the Board's audio equipment, he was unable to review the full record of the public hearing.

² One Board Member voted to deny parole with a review two years from the date of the hearing.

STATEMENT OF THE CASE: On July 1, 2004, 24-year-old Van Gustave and 25-year-old Joseph Spinucci went with their respective girlfriends to Albion Street in Somerville to watch a fireworks display. Both men were armed with knives when they went out that evening. They had both indicated earlier in the evening that they needed the knives in case they ran into any problems.

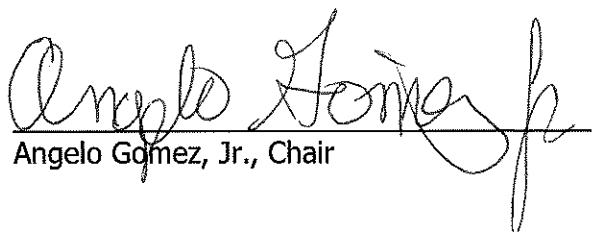
At approximately 11:00 p.m., an altercation ensued with a group of three young men, 16-year-old Ryan Sullivan, 17-year-old Jules Stevens and 19-year-old William Tighe. Mr. Gustave and Mr. Spinucci took out their knives. Mr. Sullivan and his friends were unarmed. Mr. Gustave and Mr. Spinucci began chasing the three young men down the street with their knives, stabbing all three of the young men. Mr. Sullivan suffered multiple stab wounds and later succumbed to his injuries at the hospital. Both Mr. Gustave and Mr. Spinucci were located and arrested by police on July 2, 2004.

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.

DECISION OF THE BOARD: Mr. Gustave appeared before the Board for the third time. Since his last appearance in 2023, he has remained disciplinary report free. He has completed an additional six programs and has been a facilitator for Alternatives to Violence. Mr. Gustave has engaged in the work that the Board recommended after the last hearing, including dialectical behavioral therapy. He has remained employed as a runner. He presents insight into his needs for re-entry. The Board heard testimony from numerous members of the community in support of parole, including one member of Mr. Sullivan's family. The Board also heard testimony from Mr. Sullivan's family, as well as Middlesex County Assistant District Attorney Alicia Walsh, in opposition to parole. The Board concludes that Van Gustave has demonstrated a level of rehabilitation that would make his release compatible with the welfare of society.

SPECIAL CONDITIONS: Waive work for 2 weeks; Curfew between 10 pm and 6 am at PO's discretion, Electronic monitoring for 6 months; Supervise for drugs, testing in accordance with Agency policy; Supervise for liquor abstinence, testing in accordance with Agency policy; Report to assigned MA Parole Office on day of release; No contact with victim's family; Must have mental health evaluation and follow recommendations; Must have substance abuse evaluation and follow recommendations; Long Term Residential Program; AA three times a week; Mandatory - MGH DBT Program or similar DBT Program.

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.



Angelo Gomez, Jr., Chair

January 13, 2026
Date