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PAROLE BOARD

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Gloriann Moroney
Chair

Kevin Keefe
Executive Director

DECISION

IN THE MATTER OF

VERONICA JEFFERSON

F80494

TYPE OF HEARING: Initial Hearing

DATE OF HEARING: May 17, 2022

DATE OF DECISION: September 29, 2022

PARTICIPATING BOARD MEMBERS: Dr. Charlene Bonner, Tonomey Coleman, Tina Hurley, Colette Santa¹

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 in two years from the date of the hearing.²

I. STATEMENT OF THE CASE

On December 8, 2005, in Suffolk Superior Court, Veronica Jefferson pleaded guilty to murder in the second degree and was sentenced to life in prison with the possibility of parole. On that same day, Ms. Jefferson was also convicted of six counts of larceny.

On the morning of April 5, 2002, Veronica Jefferson beat and stabbed 68-year-old Robert Carlson in his basement apartment in Roxbury. The most serious wound was a four-inch stab wound to the tissue surrounding his heart. During the assault, Mr. Carlson called 911. On the tape of his call, Mr. Carlson can be heard saying that "she's killing me," while Ms. Jefferson was heard shouting. When police officers responded (without knowing the details of the 911 call), they found Ms. Jefferson bleeding profusely from a knife wound to her finger. She explained that

¹ Chair Moroney was recused.

² One Board Member voted to deny parole with a review in three years.

she rented a room on the second floor and had accidentally cut her herself in the kitchen. The officers left after Ms. Jefferson refused medical attention.

After killing Mr. Carlson, Ms. Jefferson cashed several checks drawn on his checking account. Then, on April 11, 2002, Ms. Jefferson called 911 to report that her landlord had been "murdered." She claimed that she went into his apartment on April 5 to ask a question, but the landlord apparently mistook her for an intruder and cut her finger with a knife. Ms. Jefferson then "lost it" by beating the victim with a pipe and, possibly, stabbing him. She admitted that she had lied to the responding officers on April 5. Mr. Carlson's apartment was bloodied from his bedroom to the hallway, where he was found by investigators on April 11. A large bloodstain on his mattress and blood splatter on the headboard indicated that the attack began while he was in bed. Police found a broken knife handle in the apartment. The bloody blade was found in one of five garbage bags placed at the curb in front of the house by Ms. Jefferson. The bags also contained bloody men's clothing, bed sheets, and a blanket.

II. PAROLE HEARING ON MAY 17, 2022³

Veronica Jefferson, now 56 years old, appeared for her initial parole hearing after serving 20 years of a life sentence for murder in the second degree. She was represented by Attorney Deirdre Thurber. Ms. Jefferson responded to the Board's questions about her version of the governing offense. She described startling Mr. Carlson in his home, while he was sleeping, which led to a physical altercation. Ms. Jefferson told the Board that while she originally considered her actions to be in self-defense, she now recognizes that she took a man's life. At first, she tried to make it look like she was the one who was harmed. Eventually, she turned herself in because of guilt over her actions.

Upon Board Member questioning, Ms. Jefferson said that she lost both parents at a young age and spent time in foster care. Throughout her life, she struggled with substance abuse and experienced homelessness. Ms. Jefferson reported that she was predisposed to substance dependency based on her family background. She engaged in drug trafficking and smoked marijuana, which she would lace with cocaine to complete schoolwork and deal with other life challenges. Ms. Jefferson stated that she has struggled with mental health issues since the age of seven. She has received a variety of mental health diagnoses and has developed several medical issues.

When Board Members questioned her as to her institutional adjustment, which includes the accrual of approximately 100 disciplinary reports, Ms. Jefferson pointed out that only one report involved a fight. Ms. Jefferson stated that she spent two years in the Residential Treatment Unit. She completed two drug treatment programs and several rehabilitative programs and participated in anger management. Ms. Jefferson currently engages in mental health counseling and is prescribed antipsychotic medications.

Ms. Jefferson's social worker testified in support of parole. The Board considered testimony in opposition to parole from the victim's ex-wife, grandson, and two granddaughters. The Board considered testimony in opposition to parole from the Suffolk County District Attorney's

³ The entire video recording of Ms. Jefferson's May 17, 2022 hearing is fully incorporated by reference into the Board's decision.

Office. The Board also considered a letter in opposition to parole from the Boston Police Department.

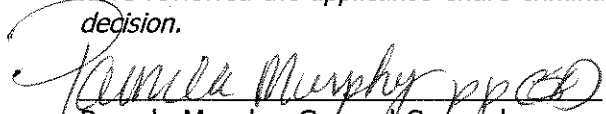
III. DECISION

The Board is of the opinion that Veronica Jefferson has not demonstrated a level of rehabilitative progress that would make her release compatible with the welfare of society. On April 5, 2002, Ms. Jefferson stabbed 68-year-old Robert Carlson, her landlord at the time. She has had a difficult adjustment, as evidenced by 99 d[isciplinary] reports, as well as her admission of anger issues. The Board recognizes that Ms. Jefferson has a very complex profile to include neuro-psychological deficits and major mental illness, as well as medical issues. Given her many needs, she will require a very comprehensive re-entry plan. The Board is concerned with her history of vacillating commitment to mental health recommendations. She recently stated that she would decline all DMH (Department of Mental Health) services. The Board reviewed an evaluation by Lauren Hanigman LICSW and a neuro-psychological evaluation by Dr. Peters from 2004. The Board would recommend an updated forensic psychological evaluation with recommendations for a re-entry plan to meet all needs.

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 Ms. Jefferson's institutional behavior, as well as her participation in available work, educational, and treatment programs during the period of her incarceration. The Board has also considered a risk and needs assessment and whether risk reduction programs could effectively minimize Ms. Jefferson's risk of recidivism. Applying this standard to the circumstances of Ms. Jefferson's case, the Board is of the opinion that Veronica Jefferson is not yet rehabilitated and, therefore, does not merit parole at this time.

Ms. Jefferson's next appearance before the Board will take place in two years from the date of this hearing. During the interim, the Board encourages Ms. Jefferson to continue working toward her 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

9/29/22
Date