



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Public Safety



PAROLE BOARD

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DECISION

IN THE MATTER OF

BARBARA GOUCHER

F36750

TYPE OF HEARING: Initial Hearing

DATE OF HEARING: March 26, 2013

DATE OF DECISION: June 14, 2013

PARTICIPATING BOARD MEMBERS: Cesar Archilla, Dr. Charlene Bonner, Tonomey Coleman, Sheila Dupre, Ina Howard-Hogan, Lucy Soto-Abbe, Josh Wall

DECISION OF THE BOARD: After careful consideration of all relevant facts, including the nature of the underlying offense, institutional record, the views of the public as expressed at the hearing or in written submissions to the Board, we conclude by a unanimous vote that the inmate is not a suitable candidate for parole at this time. Parole is denied with a review in four years.

I. STATEMENT OF THE CASE

Barbara Ann Goucher appeared before the Board for an Initial Hearing seeking parole from her life sentence for second degree murder.

On February 28, 1998, Barbara Ann Goucher (age 33) went to the home of Florence Munroe (age 50) to convince Ms. Munroe to give her money to buy drugs. Ms. Munroe had taken Ms. Goucher into her home several months prior in an effort to help Ms. Goucher because she was homeless and destitute. Ms. Goucher had stolen from Ms. Munroe on numerous occasions, and had recently stolen a hand held video game that belonged to Ms. Munroe's daughter. Ms. Munroe ultimately told Ms. Goucher she could no longer help her and told her she had to move out. Upon convincing Ms. Munroe to let her back into her apartment under false pretenses, Ms. Goucher admitted to taking the game, and stated she would be able to pay her back, but she needed money in advance. Ms. Goucher intended to buy enough drugs to support her daily habit, and sell the rest for profit. Ms. Munroe refused to give her any more

money, and an argument ensued. Ms. Munroe again asked Ms. Goucher to leave. Ms. Goucher became enraged and chased Ms. Munroe throughout her apartment, trying to steal her pocket book. As she chased Ms. Munroe from room to room, she continuously beat her and stabbed her. Ms. Goucher inflicted a total of 15 stab wounds, 72 incised wounds, and 21 puncture wounds to all parts of Ms. Munroe's body.

After inflicting a significant number of injuries to Ms. Munroe, she suffocated her by covering her head with a plastic bag and a cushion. After Ms. Munroe was deceased, Ms. Goucher searched her apartment for valuables and medication that she knew had been prescribed to Ms. Munroe. At some point during the evening, Ms. Goucher took Ms. Munroe's clothes off, washed her, cut some of her hair, and left her in the apartment naked.

On March 3, Ms. Munroe's daughter, Tammy O'Donnell went to her mother's apartment to check on her after she was unable to reach her. She discovered her mother's body and called for help. After police interviewed many witnesses, they were led to Ms. Goucher, who provided numerous false statements about her whereabouts. Witnesses also provided statements that Ms. Goucher had tried to convince others to provide an alibi for her. Police arrested Ms. Goucher on March 4, 1998 and charged her with the murder of Ms. Munroe.

On July 16, 1999 in Essex Superior Court, Ms. Goucher pled guilty to second-degree murder.

II. PAROLE HEARING ON MARCH 26, 2013

This was Ms. Goucher's first parole hearing after serving 15 years of her life sentence. She was represented by Robert Barnett and Elizabeth Denniston, student attorneys from the Harvard Prison Legal Assistance Project.

Ms. Goucher provided a tearful opening statement accepting full responsibility for the death of Ms. Munroe. She apologized to the family and stated that she was under the influence at the time of the murder, thus she could only recall certain details of what she had done. After further questioning about her state of mind, Ms. Goucher agreed she initially entered the apartment in withdrawal from drugs, and was in a desperate state. She had been abusing drugs daily for many months. Her sole goal that evening was to feed her drug habit to alleviate her physical and emotional pain.

After committing the murder she ingested benzodiazapines, or Klonopin, that were prescribed to Ms. Munroe. Ms. Goucher had been primarily abusing opiates at the time of the murder, and would also abuse other available drugs. She insisted that her chronic and severe drug abuse both precipitated the murder and caused her to inflict unthinkable violence on Ms. Munroe. In the absence of her serious addiction, Ms. Goucher insisted that she was not capable of such violence.

Ms. Goucher's history of personal trauma, including abuse and neglect as a child, inconsistent placements throughout the foster-care system, and unhealthy relationships as an adult led to her significant abuse of drugs and alcohol. Ms. Goucher has three children who she states grounded her and provided her with the incentive to remain sober; however, she could not maintain her sobriety following her pregnancies and she eventually lost custody of her

children. She did have periods of sobriety with the assistance of residential treatment, and would again have opportunities to regain custody of her children; however, she could not sustain her sobriety and she sank deeper into her addiction.

After losing custody of her children for the final time, she began to support her drug habit by committing crimes. Ms. Goucher admits that she met Ms. Munroe at a period of her life when she had increased her daily opiate use to daily intravenous heroin. She admits that she took advantage of Ms. Munroe's kindness and abused her trust by frequently stealing from her. Ms. Goucher also insisted that she introduced Ms. Munroe to heroin; however, there is no corroborating testimony from the many witnesses who knew Ms. Munroe personally that she ever abused drugs. The Parole Board found no credence in this part of her testimony, and expressed concerns about such statements being insensitive to Ms. Munroe and her family. Ms. Goucher did not continue or defend such accusations and again apologized to the Munroe family.

Ms. Goucher described the events leading up to the murder and what she said she could recall about that day. Ms. Goucher stated she had not truly learned of all the wounds she inflicted on Ms. Munroe until she reviewed her plea agreement with her attorney. The details that she did recall, however, included chasing Ms. Munroe, trying to steal her pocketbook, and cleaning Ms. Munroe's body. She did not deny that she physically assaulted Ms. Munroe and that she stabbed her. Given the significant level of violence inflicted on Ms. Munroe, and her assumed painful death, the Board continued to question Ms. Goucher about what she did, why and how she thinks she was capable of such violence. Ms. Goucher's responses focused on her remorse for taking Ms. Munroe's life; however, she appeared to struggle with appreciating that the level of violence she inflicted puts her in a small category of offenders. She continued to attribute her behavior to her addiction. The Board relayed concerns that even with her addiction, Ms. Goucher's conduct far exceeded what most people would ever be capable of committing. Ms. Goucher appeared to minimize or repress the excessiveness and severity of the injuries she inflicted upon Ms. Munroe. Even with prompting, she continued to provide a vague account of stabbing Ms. Goucher, and suffocating her, and she failed to provide an appreciation for the number of stab wounds and injuries Ms. Munroe suffered. This was a critical focus of Ms. Goucher's hearing as the Board emphasized how Ms. Munroe's death reflected an extraordinary amount of torture and suffering that Ms. Goucher failed to describe, and failed to explain how she was capable of such violence. Ms. Goucher did continue to express her remorse for the murder of Ms. Munroe, and did not dispute the facts as they were relayed to her by the Board.

Ms. Goucher has invested in programming and education. As a result of her pursuit to continue her education through Boston University, she declined the opportunity to participate in other violence reduction and substance abuse programming. Ms. Goucher also chose at times to work in the institution and develop her occupational skill set rather than attend recommended treatment programming. Ms. Goucher explained that she thought her educational needs and occupational skills would be most essential in her successful reintegration into the community. She acknowledged that as a result of some of her choices, she did not attend some recommended treatment programs. Ms. Goucher has engaged in some substance abuse, anger management, and mental health treatment, particularly related to her trauma history. She has not incurred any disciplinary reports for substance abuse; however, demonstrated in her 14 disciplinary reports is a pattern of insolence and angry

responses. Although the Board noted her disciplinary issues have not been excessive, and are viewed within the context of a stressful prison setting, Ms. Goucher recognized that she continues to struggle with her anger. Ms. Goucher believes her continued investment in treatment as incorporated into a parole plan would sufficiently meet all her needs.

Ms. Goucher provided a comprehensive parole plan consisting of completing further recommended treatment in lower security before transitioning to continued residential treatment and then to outpatient services. Her parole plan would include continued substance abuse and mental health treatment. Ms. Goucher's detailed plan encompasses a period of approximately two to three years as she integrates back into society. Ms. Goucher has remained in contact with her children and she has also established a support system while incarcerated. Speaking in support of her parole was her spiritual and educational advisor, her oldest son, and her mother. All of Ms. Goucher's supporters were willing to assist her to reintegrate into society successfully.

Ms. Munroe's children spoke in opposition to parole. Her son, Adam Munroe, and daughters, Rene and Tammy Munroe, provided testimony of how their mother's murder has impacted their own growth and development as well as that of their children. Tammy Munroe provided testimony of how finding her mother's body has resulted in her own trauma history and as a result, her own children have suffered. The family and Board Members expressed concern that Ms. Goucher may not appreciate the gravity of how many people were affected by Ms. Munroe's death.

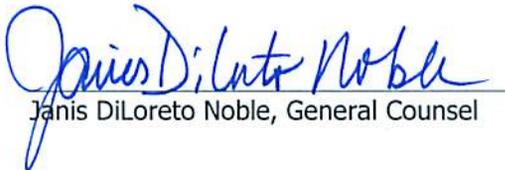
III. DECISION

The Parole Board recognizes that Ms. Goucher has done some significant work on herself in an effort to rehabilitate. She entered the prison system with many treatment needs, poor occupational skills, and educational deficits. Ms. Goucher has addressed some of her needs, but primarily focused on increasing her education and working. Given that Ms. Goucher has had a life filled with trauma and fueled by addiction, the Parole Board questioned whether she has sufficiently rehabilitated and is ready to continue her treatment within the context of her parole release plan. Based on all relevant factors in evaluating the effectiveness of her rehabilitation, the Parole Board is in unanimous agreement that Ms. Goucher has more work to do, and that the four goals of sentencing – punishment, deterrence, public protection, and rehabilitation – have not been met. Ms. Goucher's deficiencies were evidenced by her presentation and written responses that directly related to the Board's questions regarding her insight and recognition of the excessive violence she used to commit this murder. Ms. Goucher recognizes that Ms. Munroe was not only a caring friend, but that she saved her in her time of need. Ms. Goucher failed to explain her behavior, aggression, extremely violent attack, and her actions that followed to the extent that demonstrates she has sufficiently rehabilitated. At this point it is unclear if Ms. Goucher has repressed some of her memories, or if she does not want to acknowledge the level of rage and violence she was capable of committing, or if she believes such behavior is explained simply by her addiction. The Board highly recommends that Ms. Goucher devote more of her rehabilitation to answering these questions. In addition, her disciplinary issues, although not excessive, reveal a continued pattern of a disproportionate angry response. Finally, given her serious history of addiction, Ms. Goucher should complete the recommended treatment that will assist her in not only maintaining sobriety, but learning

more about the precipitants to her use, and promoting insight about the level of rage she had related to drug use or desire to obtain more drugs.

The standard 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 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." Applying that appropriately high standard, the Parole Board concludes that Ms. Goucher is not currently suitable for parole. It is the unanimous decision of the Parole Board to deny Mr. Goucher's parole with a review in four years. The Parole Board highly recommends that Ms. Goucher increase and pursue the program and treatment portion of her 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.


Janis DiLoreto Noble, General Counsel

6/14/13
Date