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Administrative Appeal Decision - Royle, William (2019-02-06)

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STATE OF NEW YORK – BOARD OF PAROLE

ADMINISTRATIVE APPEAL DECISION NOTICE

Name: Royle, William

Facility: Elmira CF

NYSID: [REDACTED]

Appeal Control No.: 07-007-18 B

DIN: 80-C-0314

Appearances: Diane Webster-Brady, Esq.
P.O. Box 2617
Plattsburgh, New York 12901

Decision appealed: June 2018 decision denying discretionary release and imposing a hold of 24-months.

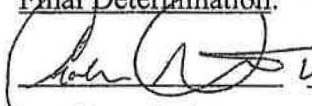
Board Member(s) who participated: **Berliner, Crangle**

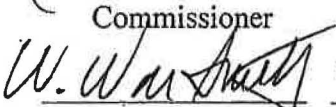
Papers considered: Appellant's Brief received October 30, 2018


Appeals Unit Review: Statement of the Appeals Unit's Findings and Recommendation

Records relied upon: Pre-Sentence Investigation Report, Parole Board Report, Interview Transcript, Parole Board Release Decision Notice (Form 9026), COMPAS instrument, Offender Case Plan.

Final Determination: The undersigned determine that the decision appealed is hereby:

 Affirmed Vacated, remanded for de novo interview Modified to _____
Commissioner

 Affirmed Vacated, remanded for de novo interview Modified to _____
Commissioner

 Affirmed Vacated, remanded for de novo interview Modified to _____
Commissioner

If the Final Determination is at variance with Findings and Recommendation of Appeals Unit, written reasons for the Parole Board's determination must be annexed hereto.

This Final Determination, the related Statement of the Appeals Unit's Findings and the separate findings of the Parole Board, if any, were mailed to the Inmate and the Inmate's Counsel, if any, on 2/6/19 66.

STATE OF NEW YORK – BOARD OF PAROLE

APPEALS UNIT FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATION

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Appellant was sentenced to 25 years to life upon his conviction of multiple offenses including Murder in the second degree and Burglary in the second degree. In the instant appeal, Appellant, through counsel, challenges the June 2018 determination of the Board to deny discretionary release to parole with a 24-month hold on the following grounds: (1) the decision was conclusory and unsupported by the record; and (2) Appellant was not treated in accordance with the guidelines provided by regulation and case law inasmuch as he was denied a fair interview. These arguments are without merit.

As an initial matter, discretionary release to parole is not to be granted “merely as a reward for good conduct or efficient performance of duties while confined but after considering if there is a reasonable probability that, if such inmate is released, he will live and remain at liberty without violating the law, **and** that his release is not incompatible with the welfare of society **and** will not so deprecate the seriousness of his crime as to undermine respect for the law.” Executive Law § 259-i(2)(c)(A) (emphasis added); accord Matter of Hamilton v. New York State Div. of Parole, 119 A.D.3d 1268, 990 N.Y.S.2d 714 (3d Dept. 2014). Executive Law § 259-i(2)(c)(A) requires the Board to consider criteria which is relevant to the specific inmate, including, but not limited to, the inmate’s institutional record and criminal behavior. People ex rel. Herbert v. New York State Bd. of Parole, 97 A.D.2d 128, 468 N.Y.S.2d 881 (1st Dept. 1983).

In 2011, the law was amended to further require procedures incorporating risk and needs principles to “assist” the Board in making parole release decisions. Executive Law § 259-c(4). The Board satisfies this requirement in part by using the COMPAS instrument. Matter of Montane v. Evans, 116 A.D.3d 197, 202, 981 N.Y.S.2d 866, 870 (3d Dept. 2014); see also Matter of Hawthorne v. Stanford, 135 A.D.3d 1036, 1042, 22 N.Y.S.3d 640, 645 (3d Dept. 2016); Matter of Robles v. Fischer, 117 A.D.3d 1558, 1559, 985 N.Y.S.2d 386, 387 (4th Dept. 2014). Notably, the 2011 amendments did not eliminate the requirement that the Board conduct a case-by-case review of each inmate by considering the statutory factors including the inmate’s criminal behavior. The amendments also did not change the substantive standards that the Board is required to apply when deciding whether to grant parole. Executive Law § 259-i(2)(c)(A). Thus, the COMPAS instrument cannot mandate a particular result. Matter of King v. Stanford, 137 A.D.3d 1396, 26 N.Y.S.3d 815 (3d Dept. 2016). Rather, the COMPAS is an additional consideration that the Board must weigh along with the statutory factors for the purposes of deciding whether the three standards are satisfied. See Matter of Rivera v. N.Y. State Div. of Parole, 119 A.D.3d 1107, 1108, 990 N.Y.S.2d 295 (3d Dept. 2014); accord Matter of Dawes v. Annucci, 122 A.D.3d 1059, 994 N.Y.S.2d 747 (3d Dept. 2014); see also Matter of Gonzalvo v. Stanford, 153 A.D.3d 1021, 56 N.Y.S.3d 896 (3d Dept. 2017).

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While consideration of the statutory factors is mandatory, “the ultimate decision to parole a prisoner is discretionary.” Matter of Silmon v. Travis, 95 N.Y.2d 470, 477, 718 N.Y.S.2d 704, 708 (2000). Thus, it is well settled that the weight to be accorded the requisite factors is solely within the Board’s discretion. See, e.g., Matter of Delacruz v. Annucci, 122 A.D.3d 1413, 997 N.Y.S.2d 872 (4th Dept. 2014); Matter of Hamilton, 119 A.D.3d at 1271, 990 N.Y.S.2d at 717; Matter of Garcia v. New York State Div. of Parole, 239 A.D.2d 235, 239, 657 N.Y.S.2d 415, 418 (1st Dept. 1997). The Board need not explicitly refer to each factor in its decision, nor give them equal weight. Matter of Betancourt v. Stanford, 148 A.D.3d 1497, 49 N.Y.S.3d 315 (3d Dept. 2017); Matter of King, 137 A.D.3d 1396, 26 N.Y.S.3d 815. In the absence of a convincing demonstration that the Board did not consider the statutory factors, it must be presumed that the Board fulfilled its duty. Matter of McKee v. New York State Bd. of Parole, 157 A.D.2d 944, 945, 550 N.Y.S.2d 204, 205 (3d Dept. 1990).

The record as a whole, including the interview transcript, reflects that the Board considered the appropriate factors, including: the instant offenses wherein Appellant stole handguns from a dwelling and later fatally shot a Greek Orthodox priest with one of the guns during an attempted burglary of the church; Appellant’s criminal history and that he was on parole for approximately three months when the instant offenses occurred; his institutional record including completion of [REDACTED] ART, and vocational training and poor discipline but clean since the last Board appearance; and release plans to relocate from [REDACTED], work with a reentry program and go to a shelter if housing is not available, and pursue employment in baking or the Garment District. The Board also had before it and considered, among other things, the sentencing minutes, Appellant’s case plan, the COMPAS instrument, and letter(s) of assurance.

After considering all required factors and principles, the Board acted within its discretion in determining release would not satisfy the standards provided for by Executive Law § 259-i(2)(c)(A). In reaching its conclusion, the Board permissibly relied on the instant offenses involving a senseless loss of life, the tragic escalation of a criminal history that includes multiple prior convictions, elevated scores in the COMPAS instrument for abscond risk and reentry substance abuse, and that Appellant’s plans to relocate are still only loosely defined. See Matter of Bush v. Annucci, 148 A.D.3d 1392, 50 N.Y.S.3d 180 (3d Dept. 2017); Matter of Delrosario v. Stanford, 140 A.D.3d 1515, 34 N.Y.S.3d 696 (3d Dept. 2016); Matter of Moore v. New York State Bd. of Parole, 137 A.D.3d 1375, 26 N.Y.S.3d 412, 413 (3d Dept. 2016); Matter of Warren v. New York State Div. of Parole, 307 A.D.2d 493, 493, 761 N.Y.S.2d 883 (3d Dept. 2003).

That a Commissioner initially questioned Appellant’s contacts with programs downstate under the impression Appellant would be returning to [REDACTED] and referred to a decade out when discussing reentry challenges does not undermine the decision. Appellant explained, and the

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decision reflects the Board understood, his intention to relocate. It also is clear from the overall record that the Board understood the length of time served and considered the applicable factors. Appellant's institutional programming does not render reentry concerns irrational. Insofar as Appellant now disputes the COMPAS instrument's risk score for absconding from parole, the Board does not determine COMPAS scores and an administrative appeal before the Board is not the proper forum to challenge a COMPAS instrument. Nonetheless, that Appellant lost all contact with his family and is aware he is not welcome back in the ██████ community hardly demonstrates the abscond risk score is unsupported, nor does it render the Board's concerns with the score, and his release plans, irrational. Insofar as Appellant also asserts the Board failed to properly consider victim impact by making an adequate inquiry during the interview, the Board is not required to discuss confidential information, if any, during the interview. 9 N.Y.C.R.R. § 8002.1(c).

Contrary to Appellant's claim, the Board's decision satisfied the criteria set out in Executive Law § 259-i(2)(a), as it was sufficiently detailed to inform the inmate of the reasons for the denial of parole. Matter of Applegate v. New York State Bd. of Parole, 164 A.D.3d 996, 997, 82 N.Y.S.3d 240 (3d Dept. 2018); Matter of Kozlowski v. New York State Bd. of Parole, 108 A.D.3d 435, 968 N.Y.S.2d 87 (1st Dept. 2013); Matter of Little v. Travis, 15 A.D.3d 698, 788 N.Y.S.2d 628 (3d Dept. 2005); Matter of Davis v. Travis, 292 A.D.2d 742, 739 N.Y.S.2d 300 (3d Dept. 2002). The Board addressed many of the factors and principles considered in individualized terms and explained those that ultimately weighed most heavily in its deliberations: namely, Appellant's criminal record and the senseless loss of life involved in the instant offense, elevated COMPAS scores for abscond risk and reentry substance abuse, and that Appellant's release plans are still only loosely defined. The Board is not required to state what an inmate should do to improve his chances for parole in the future. Matter of Francis v. New York State Div. of Parole, 89 A.D.3d 1312, 934 N.Y.S.2d 514 (3d Dept. 2011); Matter of Freeman v. New York State Div. of Parole, 21 A.D.3d 1174, 800 N.Y.S.2d 797 (3d Dept. 2005); Matter of Partee v. Evans, 40 Misc.3d 896, 969 N.Y.S.2d 733 (Sup. Ct. Albany Co. 2013), aff'd, 117 A.D.3d 1258, 984 N.Y.S.2d 894 (3d Dept. 2014), lv. denied, 24 N.Y.3d 901, 995 N.Y.S.2d 710 (2014).

Finally, the transcript as a whole does not support Appellant's contention that the parole interview was conducted improperly or that he was denied a fair interview. Matter of Rivers v. Evans, 119 A.D.3d 1188, 989 N.Y.S.2d 400 (3d Dept. 2014); see also Matter of Mays v. Stanford, 55 N.Y.S.3d 502, 150 A.D.3d 1521 (3d Dept. 2017); Matter of Bonilla v. New York State Bd. of Parole, 32 A.D.3d 1070, 1071, 820 N.Y.S.2d 661, 662 (3d Dept. 2006). The appellant was not harassed, retried or resentenced. Matter of Mullins v. New York State Bd. of Parole, 136 A.D.3d 1141, 1142, 25 N.Y.S.3d 698 (3d Dept. 2016). Rather, the Board fulfilled its obligation to determine the propriety of release per Executive Law § 259-i(2)(c)(A) and after considering the factors set forth therein. Executive Law § 259 et seq.; Penal Law § 70.40; Matter of Murray v.

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Evans, 83 A.D.3d 1320, 920 N.Y.S.2d 745 (3d Dept. 2011); Matter of Crews v. New York State Exec. Dept. Bd. of Parole Appeals Unit, 281 A.D.2d 672, 720 N.Y.S.2d 855 (3d Dept. 2001). Appellant's apparent objection to one Commissioner recusing himself is unpreserved, unexplained and without merit.

Recommendation: Affirm.