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Administrative Appeal Decision - Saldana, Juan Sr (2020-01-16)

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STATE OF NEW YORK – BOARD OF PAROLE

ADMINISTRATIVE APPEAL DECISION NOTICE

Name: Saldana, Juan

Facility: Wende CF

NYSID: [REDACTED]

Appeal Control No.: 04-219-19 B

DIN: 93-A-3364

Appearances: Stephen Underwood, Esq.
1395 Union Road
West Seneca, New York 14224

Decision appealed: April 2019 decision, denying discretionary release and imposing a hold of 24 months.

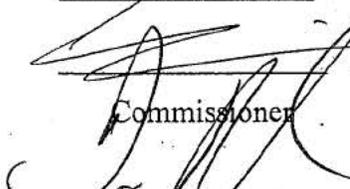
Board Member(s) who participated: Alexander, Crangle, Smith

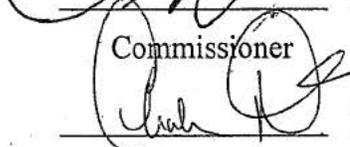
Papers considered: Appellant's Brief received August 20, 2019

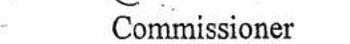
Appeals Unit Review: Statement of the Appeals Unit's Findings and Recommendation

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 11/16/20 .

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Appellant was sentenced to 18 years to life upon his conviction of Murder in the second degree and Burglary in the second degree. In the instant appeal, Appellant challenges the April 2019 determination of the Board denying release and imposing a 24-month hold on the following grounds: (1) the decision was unlawful, arbitrary and capricious because the Board relied on the instant offense and discipline in the absence of any aggravating circumstances and without properly considering all other statutory factors such as mitigating factors of the crime; (2) the Board failed to state in detail the reasons for the denial of parole; (3) the decision was arbitrary and capricious because the Board denied parole for the same reasons given on Appellant's prior appearances; (4) the decision was tantamount to a resentencing and denies him a legitimate expectation of release; (5) the Board failed to comply with Executive Law § 259-c(4) because Appellant was denied release even though the COMPAS instrument found him to be an overall low risk; (6) DOCCS failed to develop a Transitional Accountability Plan (TAP) for Appellant; and (7) Appellant was denied due process because the panel failed to provide a record of its deliberations. 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).

While consideration of these 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 v. Stanford, 137 A.D.3d 1396, 26 N.Y.S.3d 815 (3d Dept. 2016). 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 Fuchino v. Herbert, 255 A.D.2d 914, 914, 680 N.Y.S.2d 389,

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390 (4th Dept. 1998); 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 offense wherein Appellant shot and killed a man who returned home with his wife while Appellant and his 17 year old son were removing property from their residence; Appellant's problems with substance abuse; Appellant's criminal history that includes a prior State term; his institutional record including uneven rehabilitation efforts due to discipline and numerous drug infractions with a recent Tier III; and release plans to work with Fortune Society. The Board also had before it and considered, among other things, an official D.A. statement, Appellant's case plan, the COMPAS instrument, Appellant's apology letter and letters 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 offense, that it is a continuation of Appellant's criminal history, Appellant's uneven rehabilitation efforts impeded by discipline, the number of drug infractions including the recent Tier III, official opposition to release, and elevated COMPAS scores for prison misconduct and reentry substance abuse. See Executive Law §§ 259-c(4), 259-i(2)(c)(A); 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 Wade v. Stanford, 148 A.D.3d 1487, 52 N.Y.S.3d 508 (3d Dept. 2017); Matter of Almonte v. New York State Bd. of Parole, 145 A.D.3d 1307, 42 N.Y.S.3d 691 (3d Dept. 2016), lv. denied, 29 N.Y.3d 905 (2017); Matter of Partee v. Evans, 117 A.D.3d 1258, 1259, 984 N.Y.S.2d 894 (3d Dept.), lv. denied, 24 N.Y.3d 901, 995 N.Y.S.2d 710 (2014). The Board urged Appellant to remain discipline free and complete recommended programs. The Board pointed out he needed to demonstrate his ability to be law abiding in the community and develop insight into his criminal history and the harm he caused. See Matter of Silmon v. Travis, 95 N.Y.2d at 478, 718 N.Y.S.2d 704. While the Board does not agree that aggravating factors are always required to support emphasis on an inmate's offense, Matter of Hamilton, 119 A.D.3d 1268, 990 N.Y.S.2d 714, the Board's decision here was based on additional considerations.

The Board's decision satisfied the criteria set out in Executive Law § 259-i(2)(a) and 9 N.Y.C.R.R. § 8002.3(d), 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

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explained those that ultimately weighed most heavily in its deliberations: namely, Appellant's criminal record, his drug infractions and incomplete programming, official opposition, and elevated COMPAS scores. 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). Nonetheless, the Board provided Appellant with recommendations to guide his behavior.

Appellant objects to the fact that the Board decision is based on the same reasons given after his last appearance before the Board. However, as the Board is required to consider the same statutory factors each time an inmate appears, it follows that the Board may deny release on the same grounds as relied upon in previous determinations. Matter of Hakim v. Travis, 302 A.D.2d 821, 754 N.Y.S.2d 600 (3d Dept. 2003); see also Matter of Siao-Pao v. Dennison, 51 A.D.3d 105, 110, 854 N.Y.S.2d 348 (1st Dept.), aff'd, 11 N.Y.3d 777, 866 N.Y.S.2d 602 (2008).

Appellant's assertion that the denial of parole release amounted to an improper resentencing is without merit inasmuch as 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. 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). The Board was vested with discretion to determine whether release was appropriate notwithstanding the minimum period of incarceration set by the Court. Matter of Burress v. Dennison, 37 A.D.3d 930, 829 N.Y.S.2d 283 (3d Dept. 2007); Matter of Cody v. Dennison, 33 A.D.3d 1141, 1142, 822 N.Y.S.2d 677 (3d Dept. 2006), lv. denied, 8 N.Y.3d 802, 830 N.Y.S.2d 698 (2007).

Moreover, an inmate has no Constitutional right to be conditionally released on parole before expiration of a valid sentence. Greenholtz v. Inmates of Nebraska Penal & Correctional Complex, 442 U.S. 1, 99 S. Ct. 2100, 2104 (1979); Matter of Russo v. Bd. of Parole, 50 N.Y.2d 69, 427 N.Y.S.2d 982 (1980); Matter of Vineski v. Travis, 244 A.D.2d 737, 664 N.Y.S.2d 391 (3d Dept. 1997). The New York State parole scheme "holds out no more than a possibility of parole" and thus does not create a protected liberty interest implicating the due process clause. Matter of Russo, 50 N.Y.2d at 75-76, 427 N.Y.S.2d at 985; see also Barna v. Travis, 239 F.3d 169, 171 (2d Cir. 2001); Matter of Freeman v. New York State Div. of Parole, 21 A.D.3d 1174, 800 N.Y.S.2d 797 (3d Dept. 2005).

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Appellant’s contention that the Board failed to comply with section 259–c(4) of the Executive Law is likewise without merit. Section 259–c(4) requires procedures incorporating risk and needs principles to “assist” the Board in making parole release decisions. 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). This is encompassed in the Board’s regulations. 9 N.Y.C.R.R. § 8002.2(a). However, the COMPAS is not predictive and was never intended to be the sole indicator of risk and needs as the Board gets risk and needs information from a variety of sources, including the statutory factors and the interview. 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 instant offense. The amendments also did not change the three 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 cannot mandate a particular result. Matter of King v. Stanford, 137 A.D.3d 1396, 26 N.Y.S.3d 815. 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). That is exactly what occurred here. As for the Transitional Accountability Plan, the name of the TAP was changed to “Offender Case Plan.” An Offender Case Plan was prepared for Appellant and made available to the Board at the time of the interview.

Finally, there is no due process requirement that the internal deliberations or discussions of the Board appear on the record. Matter of Barnes v. New York State Div. of Parole, 53 A.D.3d 1012, 862 N.Y.S.2d 639 (3d Dept. 2008); Matter of Borcsok v. New York State Div. of Parole, 34 A.D.3d 961, 823 N.Y.S.2d 310 (3d Dept. 2006); Matter of Collins v. Hammock, 96 A.D.2d 733, 465 N.Y.S.2d 84 (4th Dept. 1983).

Recommendation: Affirm.