



STATE OF ILLINOIS
 JB PRITZKER, GOVERNOR
PRISONER REVIEW BOARD

Donald Shelton, Chair

EN BANC MINUTE SHEET
OPEN SESSION— November 2, 2023

The Illinois Prisoner Review Board met in open *en banc* session at 3000 South Dirksen Parkway, Springfield, Illinois, on November 2, 2023, at the 9:00 a.m. session to discuss and deliberate parole eligibility for the following individuals in custody:

C15356	KNIGHTS, GEORGE *
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The meeting was called to order by Donald Shelton, Chair.
 Roll call was taken by Recording Secretary Alexandria Bryan.

<u>MEMBER</u>	<u>PRESENT</u>	<u>ABSENT</u>
Mr. Jared Bohland	X	
Mr. Matthew Coates	X	
Mr. William Delgado	X	
Ms. Julie Globokar	X	
Ms. Darryldean Goff	X	
Mr. Jeffrey Grubbs	X	
Mr. Rodger Heaton	X	
Ms. LeAnn Miller	X	
Mr. Donald Shelton, Chair	X	
Ms. Robin Shoffner		X
Ms. Carmen Terrones	X	
Ms. Krystal Tison	X	
Mr. Kenneth Tupy	X	

12 Members Present 1 Members Absent

The Board heard the case of George Knights C15356 as detailed in the individual case minutes.

MINUTES FOR APPROVAL for 09/21/2023: LM-RH

Open Session: LM-RH

Closed Session: LM-RH

Meeting was adjourned by (LM-RH) Leave.



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***EN BANC* MINUTE SHEET**
OPEN SESSION November 2, 2023

Individual in custody's Name: George Knights * IDOC Number: C15356

The Illinois Prisoner Review Board met in open *en banc* session at 3000 South Dirksen Parkway, Springfield, Illinois, on November 2, 2023, at the 9:00 a.m. session to discuss and deliberate parole eligibility for George Knights C15356.

Members present were Mr. Bohland, Mr. Coates, Mr. Delgado, Ms. Globokar, Ms. Goff, Mr. Grubbs, Mr. Heaton, Ms. Miller, Ms. Terrones, Ms. Tison, Mr. Tupy, and Mr. Shelton, Chairman. Ms. Shoffner was absent.

Recording Secretary: Alexandria Bryan.

PRESENTATION OF INTERVIEW AND FILE

The basis for the Board's decision, at this time, is as follows:

PRESENTATION OF INTERVIEW AND FILE

Mr. George Knights appeared for his parole interview on September 27, 2023. He was interviewed by PRB Member Mr. Rodger Heaton via Web Ex video conference. Mr. George Knights was alert, engaged, articulate and respectful. He is 76 years old. He can walk to get around within his cell and his immediate living unit, but for any longer distance he uses a wheelchair.

Mr. George Knights was convicted of two counts of murder and sentenced to serve 100 – 199 years on each count, concurrently. He has been in custody since 1970. He was convicted following a jury trial, at which he testified in his own defense that he was not guilty of the murders, and he has maintained his innocence for the murders for 53 years since the trial.

STATEMENT OF FACTS

On July 17, 1970 the Chicago Police Department had multiple officers, who were voluntarily assigned to a "Walk & Talk" Community Relations program for the Cabrini Green housing project in Chicago, on detail when a citizen reported that a rifle was being fired from one of the buildings. Cabrini-Green was a large complex on the near north side of the city that had nearly two dozen high rise towers, providing housing to more than 15,000 people on a few city blocks.

While crossing a baseball field between several of the high-rise towers, on approach to the reported area of gunfire both Sergeant Severin and Officer Rizzato were shot. They were hit by apparent sniper fire, and they both died. Additional officers responding to assist those two officers were pinned down for a time by additional sniper fire before they could recover the two bodies.



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The subsequent investigation involved a large number of officers conducting interviews at every apartment in the complex and, undoubtedly, many “street” interviews. Police concluded that the shooting was an event that had been planned for days or longer by the Black P. Stones Gang. Mr. Johnny Veal was a reputed Ambassador in the Cobra Stones. According to the SAO Statement of Facts, Mr. Johnny Veal and Petitioner Mr. George Knights had entered into a non-aggression pact with rival gang members, sealing the pact with an agreement to kill a cop.

Evidence was presented at trial that Mr. George Knights was the individual who purchased two boxes of rifle ammunition the night before the shootings, from J.W. Millikan’s, a sporting goods store in Hammond, Indiana. The morning after the murders, one box of this ammunition was found in a bag with two rifles within a garbage catch, in an incinerator chute, in the building from which the shots were fired.

Mr. George Knights’ fingerprint was found on this box of ammunition. One of the recovered rifles, the Savage .30/.30, was shown by ballistics to have been the murder weapon and was traced as connected to Mr. George Knights.

In early June 1970, Mr. George Knights told the owner of a drug store that sold ammunition that he wanted .30/.30 ammunition, and the owner, Mr. Marv Solomon, said he did not have and could not get any. Mr. George Knights told him he could go to Indiana and get any size ammunition he wanted, and Mr. Marv Solomon told him to do that. A clerk in a drug store near Cabrini-Green testified that Mr. George Knights came into the store on July 8, 1970 and left a .30-.30 shell casing and told her to tell the owner of the store that this was the ammunition he had been shooting. It was later tested by a ballistics expert and found to have been fired from the .30/.30 Savage rifle that was found in the incinerator chute at the 1150 N. Sedgwick building where Mr. George Knights worked as a janitor. A copper bullet fragment found in the field near where the officers were shot and killed, was found to have blue cotton fabric fibers on it matching the clothing worn by the officers, and that bullet had been fired from the same .30/.30 Savage rifle as used with the shell casing given to the store clerk by Mr. George Knights. Mr. George Knights testified at trial in his own defense, and he denied participating in the killings. He has denied his participation in these two murders ever since.

Mr. Roosevelt Moore stated he heard Mr. George Knights say, “I told you I was going to get two of those white motherfuckers.” Mr. George Boone stated that he saw Mr. George Knight’s co-defendant Mr. Johnny Veal while he was telling others he needed some .30/.30’s. Mr. Jerry Davis stated that he saw Mr. George Knights with two others and Mr. George Knights stated, “I shot the fuck out of those two police.” Mr. Jack Davis stated that he saw and heard Mr. Johnny Veal and Mr. George Knights on the morning of the murders say, “Are you still going to give me those shells?” About two to three hours later he stated he saw Mr. George Knights ask Mr. Johnny Veal “We are going to kill the police?” as to which Mr. Johnny Veal stated “Yes, the police don’t mean nothing to me anyway.” Mr. Jake Davis also testified that he saw Mr. George Knights in a window on the sixth floor of the 1150 building hanging a rifle out of the window. Mr. Robert Curry, a program coordinator for the National Youth Corps, testified that on the day of the murders Mr. George Knights asked him why he was having “pigs” umpire the baseball game he was organizing for youth at Cabrini Green. He also saw Mr. Johnny Veal and Mr. George Knights carrying cases, implying containers sufficient to contain rifles. Mr. Norm



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Jefferson, a security guard testified that Mr. George Knights asked him for his .38 pistol. He stated that he told Mr. George Knights No, over my dead body, and Mr. George Knights responded that that could be arranged. Mr. George Knights also made a comment to Mr. Norm Jefferson about getting 4 guns that day. Officer Curtis Crisler talked with Mr. George Knights sometime before July about a rifle he had bought, and how Mr. George Knights was accurate with it at a distance of several hundred yards. The Davis brothers recanted their trial testimony, but there were lengthy hearings held regarding that and the judge concluded the recantations were false, and very possibly the result of pressure from their gang friends to do so. That ruling was challenged on appeal but upheld by the appellate court.

A jury convicted Mr. George Knights and his co-defendant, 17-year-old Mr. Johnny Veal of both murders. The court sentenced each of them to two concurrent 100–199-year prison terms. Mr. Johnny Veal was paroled, in 2019.

Mr. George Knights and Mr. Johnny Veal appealed the convictions and sentences, arguing several issues including that the evidence was insufficient to prove their guilt beyond a reasonable doubt. The appellate court rejected those arguments in a lengthy opinion explaining in detail the evidence that proved their guilt beyond a reasonable doubt. Mr. George Knights sought to appeal again to the Illinois Supreme Court, which had discretion to accept or deny an appeal to that level, and the request was denied. Same is true for the U.S. Supreme Court. Mr. George Knights later filed a post-conviction petition in federal district court challenging his convictions on several constitutional grounds, and it was also unsuccessful, and affirmed on appeal.

CRIMINAL HISTORY

Mr. George Knights has no other criminal history.

INSTITUTIONAL ADJUSTMENT

Mr. George Knights has a substantial history of disciplinary reports while incarcerated, but almost all of it happened more than 10 years ago. In the last 25 years, he has had 12 tickets, 10 major and 2 minor. Mr. George Knights has had 2 tickets since 2014. On August 27, 2014 he received a ticket for Insolence and Threats. He received 1 month in segregation. The ticket stated that he was angry and verbally abusive when he couldn't get a nurse to give him certain medication that he believed he needed, based upon his own research. The responding Illinois Department of Corrections employee was threatened with a comment that Mr. George Knights knew he had a son, and that "his people" would make sure the son didn't make it to the bus stop or home from school. On September 27, 2021 he received a ticket for Contraband, sharp instrument. The ticket stated that he had a 3-inch piece of metal hidden in a tube between two plastic containers in his cell. He received 7 days in segregation. Mr. George Knights explanation was that it was not a weapon but something he used to score chocolate candy.

Mr. George Knights has not had an Illinois Department of Corrections job or programming since 2009, but in the past he testified that he had performed as a member of the Stateville Prison Band, and worked as a cell house clerk, a HealthCare unit porter, in the Correctional Industries sign shop, in the soap shop at Stateville, as a reporter on the prison newsletter, and held a leadership role in the Jaycees within Pontiac CC, in which they started a criminal justice committee. He also initiated a TV channel within



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the institution, conducted two interviews for that channel, and videorecorded sports games and music for inclusion on that prison TV channel. He tried to obtain records from Illinois Department of Corrections to reflect these various jobs and contributions, but due to the time that has passed, he has had difficulty obtaining those records.

STATEMENTS AS TO THE OFFENSE

Mr. George Knights continues to deny his involvement in the murders of the two officers.

PAROLE PLANS

Mr. Knights plans to live with his daughter, Ms. Taunia Knights, in the home she owns in Berkeley, IL. She has 17-year-old twins, but she also has a room ready for her father to live in and has a car and is willing to assist him with getting to any medical appointments or other commitments.

Ms. Taunia Knights has steady employment as a QA analyst for a mortgage company, and additional part time work as a hotel cook. She has nearly daily contact with her father by phone and wants to continue to have an in-person relationship with him. She testified that he has given her good advice through the years and has made his presence felt in her life and that of her children, and his grandchildren.

Mr. Knights also has a son, who testified on his behalf. He testified that he is a contractor in the telecommunications industry, lives in the Hazelcrest community, and will help support his father financially if he is granted parole.

Mr. Knights explained that at age 76, if he were paroled, he would spend his time with his family. He would like to write a book about African American inventors (which would require some research), and he would write characters into the book who reflect his own grandchildren. He would also like to write a book about this case.

OPPOSITION TO PAROLE RELEASE

There were victim-related protests to Mr. George Knights' release. The Cook County State's Attorney's office wrote a letter opposing Mr. George Knights' release, arguing that he minimizes his disciplinary record, denies his guilt despite overwhelming evidence, and that his release for an execution of these police officers would embolden others to do so as well. There were also multiple letters of protest in the file, and several witnesses who testified in protest to his release. Representatives of the FOP Lodge #7 testified against Mr. George Knights' release at the En Banc hearing.

EN BANC HISTORY

Mr. George Knights has had many parole hearings over the past decades and had not received any votes in support of parole until 2022, at which time he received two votes in support of release.



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DISCUSSION

Summary of discussion for parole consideration:

Ms. Sara Garber, Mr. George Knights' attorney, stated that this crime is a tragedy. The two men had a job, and they lost their life doing it. The record is extremely long. There are more holes in the case than foundation. When this crime took place Mr. George Knights was 23 years old, had a family, job, and just received a raise at work. He made efforts to improve his community and would throw a violence free party. He saw firsthand what the gang was doing to his community. He worked with the police to make his neighborhood better. He had no criminal history before this crime. Consider Mr. George Knights as a person, aside from the monster he is implied to be. He has had very few disciplinary tickets. None of those tickets were violent. He cares about his family and talks to them daily. He tries to keep his family moving on a positive path. He does have a long list of accomplishments in the Illinois Department of Corrections. He is 76 years old and has served 53 years in prison. He was just recently hospitalized for health conditions. He does not have many years left to live. She stated that she questioned Mr. George Knights on what he would do before he died. Before he dies, he wants to take his grandkids to the museum and visit all family that has supported him for all these years. Mr. George Knights wants to spend time with his son to allow him to understand that he is proud of the man he became and proud that he isn't in the streets. Keeping Mr. George Knights in prison will not change the officers' families not having their loved one. She stated Mr. George Knight has a low rate of recidivating.

Ms. Taunia Knights-LaSalle, Mr. George Knights' daughter, stated that she is 54 years old, and her dad has been incarcerated 53 years. She stated that she is closer to her dad than her mother. She asks for the Board to have mercy on her father. He is old and does not have much time left, and requests he comes home for the last days of his life.

Mr. Frank Dimaria stated that they have not had two officers more brutally murdered than those two that day. They were walking the neighborhood and trying to make this neighborhood better. No matter the circumstances those officers were out there walking the neighborhood to make it better. That day those officers were coordinating a game for children in the neighborhood. He stated that they used hunting rifles to shoot those officers down. Officer Severin and Rizzato's families come every year and protest at these hearings, but they can't keep coming. They have to send me to represent them at this time. The prosecutors are in their 80s at this time. They still protest this release every time. We have had numerous officers shot and killed within the last year. Many children can't leave their homes due to the violence in their neighborhoods. He stated letting out a convicted murderer would send a horrible message to Chicago. He asked for everyone to not forget the victims, and the police officers that are working the streets today.

John Catanzara, the president of the FOP, stated that this was cold hearted execution. They died from extreme blood loss. Serial killers are prime examples of leading two lives, showing their families on life and murdering people in their other. He stated that enough is enough. He requests that the Board deny Mr. Knight's release because the sentence is what the judge wanted, and Mr. Knights should serve that sentence. He stated that this is mentally draining to keep attending these hearings for the officers and the families of the victims. Mr. Catanzara requested that the Board, in addition to denying parole, direct



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that case not be considered again for the maximum of 5 years.

Ms. Globokar stated the appellate court record referenced testimony by Mr. Knights that his employment as janitor had concluded the year prior to the crime. She asked Mr. Knights' counsel whether there was reason to question the evidence of the copper bullet jackets found in the field, that matched the recovered .30/.30 rifle and had blue cotton adhered to it consistent with the officers' uniforms, as the petition claims there was no evidence that a .30/.30 rifle was used in the crime

Ms. Sara Garber, Mr. George Knights' attorney, stated that to her knowledge that there are many inconsistencies in the file and that he was employed on the day of the murders and was on duty that day. He was a janitor, and an assistant to the head Janitor. She stated her understanding is that it was unclear that the type of bullets was .30/.30's used for these murders.

Ms. Globokar questioned whether there was a reason that the attorney was unable to provide the trial transcripts that the presenting board member had requested.

Ms. Sara Garber stated that she has the copies of the trial and would be happy to share it. It is not organized like a normal transcript would be organized and she does not have the staff to do that at this time. There are inconsistencies. Many of the pages were out of order. She stated that she has read huge portions but has not read all of it. Because of all of these problems they can't fully go back. Witnesses were contradicted, and it's filled with holes. There are more questions than answers in this case.

Ms. Globokar questioned if Mr. George Knights is anticipating a transfer.

Ms. Sara Garber, Mr. George Knights' attorney, stated that he has asked for a transfer to Illinois River Correctional Center, but he has not been moved.

End of discussion.

DECISION AND RATIONALE

Motion to deny parole (RH-LM). Motion prevails by a 11-1 vote. Members voting in favor of this motion were Mr. Bohland, Mr. Coates, Mr. Delgado, Ms. Globokar, Ms. Goff, Mr. Grubbs, Mr. Heaton, Ms. Miller, Chairman Shelton, Ms. Shoffner, Ms. Tison, and Mr. Tupy. Ms. Terrones dissented.

Motion for a 5-year set (LM-JB). Motion prevails by a 7-5 vote. Members voting in favor of this motion were Mr. Bohland, Mr. Coates, Mr. Delgado, Mr. Grubbs, Ms. Miller, Chairman Shelton, and Mr. Tupy. Ms. Globokar, Ms. Goff, Mr. Heaton, Ms. Terrones, and Ms. Tison dissented.

After thorough consideration of Mr. George Knights' case, the Board voted to deny parole. The Board feels that parole release at this time would not be in the interest of public safety, as there is a substantial risk that Mr. George Knights' parole release at this time would deprecate the serious nature of the offenses and promote a lack of respect for the law.



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“The Board makes a specific finding that the release of victim protest letters could subject a person to actual risk of physical harm. The Board further notes that, pursuant to Illinois law, victim statements are confidential and privileged.”