



# ***Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Commission***

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July 22, 2019

***IN MEMORY OF:***

**Alyssa Alhadeff**

**Scott Beigel**

**Martin Duque Anguiano**

**Nicholas Dworet**

**Aaron Feis**

**Jaime Guttenberg**

**Christopher Hixon**

**Luke Hoyer**

**Cara Loughran**

**Gina Montalto**

**Joaquin Oliver**

**Alaina Petty**

**Meadow Pollack**

**Helena Ramsay**

**Alexander Schachter**

**Carmen Schentrup**

**Peter Wang**

The Honorable Ron Johnson  
United States Senate  
Chairman, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs  
340 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Gary C. Peters  
United States Senate  
Ranking Member, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs  
442 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Johnson and Ranking Member Peters:

Since March 2018, I have chaired the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Commission. The commission is a statutory body created under Florida law and it is charged with determining what occurred surrounding the February 14, 2018, mass killing at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. The commission's particular focus areas include missed intervention opportunities due to the shooter's background, ineffective school security, and problems with the law enforcement response to the shooting.

The commission met monthly during 2018. We took testimony from over 60 witnesses, reviewed thousands of pages of documents and learned the results of over 300 witness interviews conducted by commission investigators. The commission submitted its initial report to the Florida Governor and presiding officers of the Florida Legislature on January 2, 2019. The 500 page report is available at <http://www.fdle.state.fl.us/MSDHS/CommissionReport.pdf>. The report details events surrounding the Stoneman Douglas shooting and makes recommendations to enhance school safety. The commission does not sunset under law until 2023 and has continued its work in 2019.

The shooter shot 34 people in 3 minutes and 51 seconds after entering Building 12 on the Stoneman Douglas campus, killing 17 people, including 14 students. Because of lax campus security, the shooter entered the campus unfettered through unlocked, open, and unstaffed gates and doors. Like the majority of past K-12 active assailant attacks, this shooting was over in a very short period of time — less than 4 minutes.



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The shooting ended lives, changed lives permanently, and left an indelible mark on the South Florida community and the broader school community throughout Florida. Things will never be the same in Florida schools post-Marjory Stoneman Douglas shooting, nor should they because there was much that could have been done to mitigate the harm on that devastating February day last year.

Because of legislative action and a commitment by many people, we have made progress since the shooting. Our school campuses are safer today than they were a year ago; however, there is still much work to be done. There is not enough across-the-board urgency to change and there is too much complacency. The complacency is a result of an erroneous belief by some decision-makers that such an event “can’t happen here.” The reality is that such an event can happen anywhere, including Parkland, Florida — named the Safest City in Florida two days before the shooting.

Our efforts must be on preventing another school shooting, because the reality is not only can it happen anywhere, it will happen again, and the pressing questions are where and when? Despite that reality, the penultimate question is what are we doing today to drive a different outcome than what occurred at Marjory Stoneman Douglas on February 14, 2018, because what occurred at Marjory Stoneman Douglas — shooting 34 people in under 4 minutes is unacceptable. It is debatable whether the shooting was totally avoidable; however, there is clear evidence that the harm could have been mitigated through better policies and training by the school district and a more effective law enforcement response.

Effective school safety is comprised of “harm mitigation” and “prevention.” Harm mitigation focuses on stopping the attack as quickly possible once it begins and minimizing harm by rapidly getting people to safe areas. Harm mitigation, such as effective active assailant response policies, conducting regular active assailant drills, and pre-identifying safe areas within classrooms costs little to nothing and only requires the decision-maker’s will to implement these strategies. The key components of an effective harm *mitigation* strategy are identifying the threat; communicating the threat; and effectively reacting to the threat.

Harm *prevention* on the other hand includes long-term, sometimes costly strategies that may also require law or policy change in an attempt to keep an attack from occurring. Prevention efforts include behavioral threat assessment teams; physical site hardening; and sophisticated technology, such as extensive camera and other electronic monitoring systems.

While we consider prevention strategies we must immediately focus on harm mitigation because it is those strategies that will immediately prevent or reduce the loss of life and serious injury. There must be a sense of urgency and an immediate commitment across-the-board to implementing harm mitigation strategies because every moment these strategies are not in place is a moment that our schools are vulnerable.



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Unfortunately, many schools across Florida are not compliant with recently enacted laws that seek to improve school safety. A Statewide Grand Jury authorized by the Florida Supreme Court to investigate school safety matters issued an Interim Report on July 19, 2019. In that report the Grand Jury stated “[w]e find that law enforcement and the school district officials have had sufficient time to bring their districts into compliance with these laws, and we fully expect that these officials will use the remaining days before the first day of the 2019-20 school year to do whatever it takes to bring these districts into compliance.” The Grand Jury further noted that it has been 545 days since the Marjory Stoneman Douglas shooting and there is no excuse for non-compliance with effective and legally required school safety practices.

Harm mitigation strategies must be considered from the perspective of what is realistically attainable, and not summarily rejected because of ideological or political differences or because we simply do not like the requirement. Simply put, it comes down to what we can live with and 34 people shot in under 4 minutes on a high school campus is not something we can, or should live with. Some people may not “like” some of the requirements, but the alternative is unacceptable.

Schools are generally operated by local school boards and are under local control. However, we need a national strategy to improve school safety. Florida is not alone in its challenges to improve school safety. The national strategy should focus on immediate harm mitigation strategies that will make a difference and close the vulnerability gap, followed by prevention measures. Specific recommendations regarding both strategies are detailed in the January 2019, report issued by the Marjory Stoneman Douglas Public Safety Commission.

School safety requires a federal, state, and local partnership with a unified strategy. But, most of all it requires a strong commitment with a sense of urgency to effect necessary changes. We need to do more and do it now, and those who fail to comply should be held accountable.

Thank you to the committee for its effort in bringing awareness to this very important issue and for working to provide a safe school environment in every state across our country.

*Sincerely,*

**Sheriff Bob Gualtieri  
Commission Chair**