

**Prepared Statement by Senator Chuck Grassley of Iowa  
Chairman, Senate Judiciary Committee  
Hearing Titled: “See Something, Say Something:  
Oversight of the Parkland Shooting and legislative Proposals to Improve School Safety”  
March 14, 2018**

Good morning. We are here this morning to discuss a national tragedy and to mourn the loss of 17 innocent lives.

The February 14, 2018, attack on Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, was an evil act committed by a troubled young man.

He will account for what he has done in a court of law. But today, we will also call the government to account for its role in this tragedy.

Federal, state, and local officials each received tips about the alarming behavior of the Parkland shooter. Their failure to act allowed the Parkland shooter to obtain and continue to possess firearms.

In the wake of the Parkland attack, this Committee has an obligation to find out what happened. We must hold government to account for its failures, and make sure plans are in place to avoid future tragedies. And we must rally around consensus, evidenced-based solutions that will protect our nation’s most valuable resource—it’s youth—from violent attacks.

I worry that political opportunists will seek to interject their extreme agendas into this debate. That might be good for party politics and fundraising for the midterms, but it is not good for America.

I saw this happen after the Newtown shooting. After Newtown, I worked with my colleague Senator Cruz to introduce legislation that would have:

- improved reporting to the NICS background check system;
- provided grants to support school safety measures and programs;
- supported the prosecutions of dangerous people who lied to try to buy firearms;
- and authorized a government study to solve the problem of mass shootings.

That law could’ve helped prevent tragedies like the Sutherland Springs and Parkland shootings.

A majority of the Senate supported our bill, on a bipartisan basis. Tragically it was held hostage by partisan politics, and did not pass. Senator Cruz and I reintroduced the *Protecting Communities and Preserving the Second Amendment Act of 2018* last week.

In addition, I've worked with Senator Hatch to draft the *STOP School Violence Act*, which will provide needed funding to increase school safety. That bill is now cosponsored by a bipartisan group of 36 senators.

I'm also a cosponsor of Senator Cornyn's Fix NICS bill, which is supported by 68 Senators. I also support the President's effort to regulate bump stocks.

And today I want to announce that I will be introducing the *Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Memorial Act of 2018*. This bill will provide funding to support the Secret Service National Threat Assessment Center's efforts to conduct cutting edge research into the prevention of school violence. It will also enable the National Threat Assessment Center to train more of our nation's schools in how to conduct threat assessments and early interventions.

The Secret Service has already trained 93,000 government officials, school administrators, teachers, and law enforcement officials in implementing effective threat assessment programs. This training enables local communities to prevent dangerous and unstable individuals like the Parkland shooter from carrying out intended attacks.

This bill will enable the National Threat Assessment Center to share its proven techniques and research with more of our nation's school systems. It is a fitting memorial to the victims and survivors of the Parkland attack, and will help prevent future violence. I invite all of my colleagues on this Committee to support this bill as a cosponsor.

I think it's clear that we have a number of bills that the Senate can come together to support that can reduce school violence and mass shootings. Some on this Committee have said that we're not taking action—that we're not holding hearings and marking up bills on this issue.

This is the second hearing on mass shootings and related legislation that we've had in four months. That's more hearings than the last Democratic Chairman held on this issue at this point in his tenure as Chairman, despite the D.C. Sniper attacks, the Virginia Tech shooting, and other attacks during that time period.

As for markups, I've had discussions with Senate Leadership and members of this Committee on both sides of the aisle on how we can enact legislation that will help prevent violent attacks. Often, as my Democratic colleagues well know, legislation on controversial issues such as Second Amendment issues are of concern to the entire Senate. It's common for bills on these issues to bypass Committee, and to be brought straight to the floor. This is the strategy the Democrats used when they brought up Senator Manchin and Senator Toomey's bill on universal background checks when they were in charge. That bill went straight to the floor without a hearing or markup, where it was debated by the full Senate.

It's possible that a similar approach may be used now as the Senate works together to consider what should be done about school safety and preventing mass violence. In the meantime, we're

holding this hearing, which I believe is of great importance for the entire Senate, and indeed, the country.

I hope today's hearing can shed light on what government can do better to prevent future attacks.

Since the shooting, I instructed my staff to investigate what went wrong. Officials from the FBI have briefed the Committee's majority and minority staff.

We also heard from representatives from Facebook, Instagram, Google, and YouTube. They outlined their efforts to work closely with law enforcement and to quickly respond to inquiries in the Parkland case and similar cases. In briefings to the Committee, Google and Facebook officials noted that the FBI didn't reach out to them to help identify and locate the shooter. If the FBI had done so, both companies said that they would've been able to provide detailed information, including IP addresses.

That information likely would've provided the FBI with a physical address.

They also highlighted their efforts to use technology and user feedback to identify alarming content that should be referred to law enforcement for further investigation. I want to thank them for their willingness to meet and discuss these very important issues and for sending their representative to the hearing today.

I also want to thank Ryan Petty, the father of Alaina Petty, who was a victim of the Parkland attack, and Katharine Posada, a language arts teacher at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, for being with us today. We mourn your loss and look forward to your testimony and your perspective on this issue.

The Committee also invited Broward County Sheriff Scott Israel to testify. He declined.

I've seen the Sheriff all over television discussing the shooting, so it is disappointing the he has refused to speak before Congress.

Michael Carroll, Secretary of Florida's Department of Children and Families, was also invited. His Department investigated and interviewed the shooter before the attack. And, then appears to have dropped the ball. He, too, has refused to appear, even though Governor Scott didn't oppose his attendance.

By thumbing their noses at Congress, Sheriff Israel and Secretary Carroll have let the American people down and also the citizens of Florida they serve.

As we will discuss during the hearing, the Broward County Sheriff and Department of Children and Families are integral to the Parkland fact pattern.

And that fact pattern is very disturbing.

In September 2017, the shooter posted a comment on a YouTube video that read, "I'm going to be a professional school shooter." The creator of the video flagged the comment and reported it to the FBI. The September 2017 tip was routed to the FBI's West Virginia call center. According to what the FBI has told the Committee, the responsible FBI agents did not believe they had enough information to identify the shooter who made the YouTube post.

The FBI closed the case.

Then, on January 5, 2018, the FBI received a call from a woman who knew the shooter well. She described a troubled young man who posted disturbing statements and pictures of mutilated animals and guns on social media. The caller described the shooter as suicidal and with homicidal ideas. The caller also provided the FBI with the usernames to four of his social media accounts. In one account he wrote, "I want to kill people." The caller also explicitly mentioned her concern that he may get into a school and "shoot the place up."

The call taker concluded that there was no imminent threat because the tip did not provide a target date or a target location.

If the FBI had followed up on that tip, it would most likely have sent agents to interview the shooter. Either way, it appears that the FBI did not communicate with local law enforcement.

In addition to the FBI, the State of Florida has a tremendous responsibility too.

On September 28, 2016, Florida's Department of Children and Families opened an investigation into the shooter. In that investigation, DCF concluded that he is a "vulnerable adult due to mental illness." DCF's investigation also mentioned that a mobile crisis unit was deployed by Henderson Health and determined that the shooter wasn't a risk to himself or others. On November 12, 2016, DCF closed the investigation.

It appears that the State of Florida and its governmental subdivisions, including the Broward County Sheriff, may not have taken the necessary steps to involuntarily commit him. If he'd been involuntarily committed to a mental institution for treatment, he would've been entered into the NICS and prohibited from purchasing firearms.

At all levels, law enforcement must explain what went wrong, why it went wrong, and what steps it is taking to make sure these failures never happen again.

And we must determine the best, evidence-based approach to improving school safety.