



Department of Justice

**STATEMENT OF
DAVID BOWDICH
DEPUTY DIRECTOR
FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION**

**BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY
UNITED STATES SENATE**

**AT A HEARING ENTITLED
“SEE SOMETHING, SAY SOMETHING: OVERSIGHT OF THE
PARKLAND SHOOTING AND LEGISLATIVE PROPOSALS TO
IMPROVE SCHOOL SAFETY”**

**PRESENTED
MARCH 14, 2018**

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Chairman Grassley, Ranking Member Feinstein, Members of the Committee, it is my privilege to appear before you today as the Deputy Director of the FBI. This is my first appearance before any congressional committee, and I certainly wish that it were under different circumstances.

On February 14, 2018, at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, a former student allegedly shot 17 innocent people and caused significant physical and emotional harm to countless others. This tragedy abruptly ended the lives of kids who had their lives and dreams ahead of them, and stole from their families the right to watch their children grow into adulthood. As you know, the alleged perpetrator of this unspeakable violence is in custody and has been charged with 17 counts of premeditated first-degree murder and 17 counts of attempted first-degree murder by the State of Florida.

To the victims, families, and friends of those who were killed or injured on that day: Director Wray and I and the rest of the FBI extend our deepest sympathies to you. Though nothing can be said to undo the hurt and loss you all feel, please know the FBI continues to work closely with our State and local law partners in Florida to ensure that justice is served.

Unfortunately, as was disclosed by the FBI shortly after this terrible incident, the FBI did receive two separate tips that we now know were related to the alleged shooter, Nikolas Cruz. As the FBI Director has made clear, the FBI could have and should have done more to investigate the information it was provided prior to the shooting. While we will never know if any such investigative activity would have prevented this tragedy, we clearly should have done more.

Since the Director’s statement of February 16, 2018, FBI representatives have met with the families of many of the victims. In addition, the FBI has provided several briefings to Members of Congress and their staffs. Our investigation into exactly what the FBI learned prior to February 14, 2018, and what we did and did not do in response to this information is ongoing,

and we will continue to be as transparent as possible with this Committee, the Congress, and the American people about what we find and how we intend to improve our policies, procedures, and training.

To summarize the results of our investigation to date, let me walk the Committee through the relevant timeline as we understand it.

It is important to know the FBI receives tips from the public through our Public Access Line or “PAL.” The PAL is the FBI’s central contact center for all calls, electronic tips, and public leads made to the FBI’s 56 field offices. The public can connect to PAL by calling an FBI Field Office, 1-800-CALL FBI, or on the internet at tips.fbi.gov. The access line is responsible for receiving and vetting information from the public, then disseminating it to the field as actionable tips and leads for special agents and intelligence analysts. The PAL is part of the FBI’s Criminal Justice Information Services (“CJIS”) Division in Clarksburg, West Virginia, and has more than 160 members on its staff fielding public leads and tips 24 hours a day, seven days a week. During 2017, the PAL handled approximately 765,000 calls and 735,000 e-mail tips.

On September 25, 2017, the FBI received an e-mail tip from a person in Mississippi who indicated that some other person, unknown to him, posted on his YouTube page, the following text: “Im going to be a professional school shooter.” The posting was from the username “Nikolas Cruz.”

In response to this tip, the PAL opened what the FBI calls a “Guardian” lead and assigned it to the FBI’s Jackson Field Office in Mississippi. The Guardian system provides a method for reporting, sharing, tracking, and mitigating a large volume of counterterrorism-based incidents. Upon receipt of the Guardian lead, an FBI Special Agent, along with a local task force officer, visited the tipster and interviewed him on October 2, 2017. At the time of this interview, the agent was provided a copy of a “screen shot” of the subject post.

The agent subsequently conducted searches of both FBI databases and open sources. Believing the true identity of the poster could not be determined, the Guardian lead was closed on October 11, 2017, with no other investigative activity.

A few months later, on January 5, 2018, at 2:32pm, the FBI received another tip by way of a call to the PAL. The caller identified herself as a close friend of the Cruz family and she shared several pieces of information with the FBI’s West Virginia-based call center operator, including information from Cruz’s social media accounts that concerned her.

The very explicit information the caller provided included the following: statements about Cruz harming himself and others; references to the Islamic State of Iraq and ash-Sham (“ISIS”); that Cruz had threatened his mother with a rifle; that he had purchased several

weapons; that he wanted to kill people; that he was mutilating small animals; that he was going to explode; that the caller tried to call the person with whom Cruz was living, but she could not reach him; and that the caller was concerned that Cruz might shoot up a school. The caller also observed that Cruz was 18 years old but had the mental capacity of a 12 to 14-year old. She also indicated that she was very concerned, had contacted the Parkland Police Department, and just wanted someone to look into this matter.

Upon finishing the call, the FBI operator conducted a search of FBI databases and found the closed Guardian lead out of Mississippi. The operator then consulted with her supervisor and the matter was closed. The information received was not forwarded to a field office for further review or action.

As FBI officials learned of the Parkland shooting incident, FBI personnel conducted a search of its holdings and discovered that the two tips described above had been received.

Clearly, in response to the tips of September 25, 2017, and January 5, 2018, the FBI could have and should have done more. Our internal investigation started almost immediately upon learning of our receipt of these tips, and that investigation is ongoing. We have taken certain immediate remedial measures, including doubling the number of Special Agent supervisors assigned to review tips received by non-agent personnel. Other steps will likely be taken upon completion of our ongoing review.

This obviously is not the kind of news I would prefer to deliver to this Committee, but the FBI is committed to maximum transparency in all that we do on behalf of the American people. While I cannot fathom the agony, horror, and anger of the parents of these young people who were robbed of their futures, I do again want to express our sorrow and remorse to the family members. When we make mistakes, we will not hide them, and we are committed, with your help, to doing whatever is necessary to correct our mistakes and prevent tragedies like this one from being repeated.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.