



# Department of Justice

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**STATEMENT OF**  
**THOMAS E. BRANDON**  
**ACTING DIRECTOR**  
**BUREAU OF ALCOHOL, TOBACCO, FIREARMS AND EXPLOSIVES**

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

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

**PRESENTED**  
**MARCH 14, 2018**

**Statement of Thomas E. Brandon  
Acting Director  
Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives  
Before the Committee on the Judiciary  
United States Senate  
March 14, 2018**

Chairman Grassley, Ranking Member Feinstein, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives' (ATF) response to the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, on February 14, 2018.

On behalf of the men and women of ATF, I extend deeply felt condolences to the family, friends, and loved ones of those who were killed or injured that day, and to the survivors and their families. We have the utmost respect for the teachers, staff, and students at the school and the bravery they have demonstrated.

I am saddened that the reason for my appearance before this Committee is again the result of a senseless mass shooting. Unfortunately, ATF knows all too well the deadly toll of gun violence that takes place every day across the United States. When that violence occurs in our schools, it is a terrible and compelling reminder of the need for ATF to continually redouble our commitment to fulfilling our mission to combat violent gun crime.

As you are aware, the Parkland shooting investigation is ongoing, and the alleged shooter has been charged in Florida state court. Because the investigation is ongoing and the case is pending in court, I am limited in the information I can provide today about that case, but I can generally outline ATF's role in supporting our local, state, and federal partners in the response to the shooting.

The first ATF agents responded to the high school within minutes of the shooting report. These agents assisted in clearing the building of students while the search for the gunman was ongoing, and in securing the scene. ATF quickly traced the firearm recovered at the school, an AR-15 type rifle, determining that the alleged shooter had obtained the rifle about one year before from a Federal Firearms Licensee (FFL). ATF agents immediately responded to interview that FFL and secure additional evidence; in that process, they determined the FFL conducted the required background check prior to completing the sale, and the alleged shooter passed that check. While this process was ongoing, other ATF agents contacted FFLs throughout the area to determine if the alleged shooter had acquired any other firearms to ensure that any such firearms were located and secured. As the investigation continued, ATF agents assisted in serving several search warrants, including at the alleged shooter's residence. These warrants resulted in the recovery of nine additional firearms, on which ATF also conducted urgent traces. The information from those traces resulted in ATF agents conducting additional interviews of the FFLs who sold those firearms, and securing additional evidence about those transactions. Through this process, ATF helped identify all firearms known to have been purchased by the alleged shooter, and ensure that those firearms had been recovered and secured. ATF personnel engaged in the Parkland investigation has included more than 40 special agents, plus dozens of specialists and support staff from our tracing center, firearms forensics division and Crime Gun Intelligence Centers (CGICs).

The discussion following the Parkland shooting has focused on the unfortunate reality that law enforcement agencies had received several tips about the alleged shooter's

mental health issues and possession of firearms. These disclosures are gut-wrenching for all law enforcement; we are universally committed to responding appropriately whenever information is received about the potential for violence. As soon as I learned of the possibility that tip information from the public had not been effectively acted on, I ordered a review of ATF's policies and procedures for assessment and documentation of tips from the public.

At the time of the Parkland shooting, ATF's process for receiving and acting on tips from the public had been in place for several years. That process includes direct tip calls to agents in our field divisions throughout the country, and tip information received through our toll-free national telephone tip lines, through email and online tip, and via text messages through a mobile device application ATF deployed in 2016. A duty agent in each field division is designated to document, assess, and investigate tips directly received in the field, while ATF's Joint Support and Operations Center (JSOC), which is staffed 24/7, is responsible for handling tips received through email and text messages and for all tips received after business hours and on weekends. While this process has served ATF well, following our internal review, we determined that our procedures could be improved by centralizing responsibility for these functions in each field division's CGICs, and by leveraging new technologies. Using existing resources, we quickly developed, and have now deployed (effective last week), an electronic system, known as "iTip," to document, disseminate, and track tips we receive from the public, and have updated our protocols and policies to ensure consistent, effective follow-through on these tips.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, thank you again for the opportunity to discuss this matter with you today. Before I close, however, I would like to provide one last thought: while large-scale shootings understandably draw intense public scrutiny, violent crime involving firearms happens every single day in cities and towns, large and small, across the Nation. ATF's commitment to combatting this daily carnage by using our expertise to be the best possible partner to our local, state, and federal law enforcement partners is unwavering. I can assure you that the men and women of ATF are ready and are working every day to find ways to stop the daily toll of firearms-related deaths.

I am happy to answer any questions that the committee may have.