

Senator Marco Rubio Statement for the Record

United States Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

**“Examining State and Federal Recommendations for Enhancing School Safety
Against Targeted Violence”**

July 25, 2019

Chairman Johnson, Ranking Member Peters, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for holding this very important hearing. I appreciate the committee’s work on school safety and ensuring that the recommendations from both the Federal Commission on School Safety and the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Commission receive the attention and consideration they warrant.

The work of those commissions and the important discussion today would not have been possible without the dedicated fathers testifying before you. Mr. Max Schachter and Mr. Tom Hoyer have channeled their unimaginable grief into action. I admire their commitment and resolve to help ensure that other families do not endure what they have.

I am confident both would be the first to say that their efforts are not unique among the families affected by that tragic day in February 2018, and I appreciate that they are contributing to today’s hearing on behalf of many families who – though they

may not all always agree on all aspects of a solution to school safety or gun violence – remain a model as to how to take meaningful action where there is agreement and continue the discussion where there is disagreement.

I also want to commend Senator Rick Scott, who as Governor of the State of Florida convened the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Commission and appointed Pinellas County Sheriff Bob Gaultieri to lead the commission. Together, the recommendations of the federal and state commissions are critical to the forward progress we can make together for our children to go to school and return home safely.

For example, the federal government should make clear that federal law, specifically the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), does not categorically prevent schools from sharing with local law enforcement or mental health professionals important information related to student safety and should engage with school districts to ensure FERPA is not too broadly invoked and, therefore, misapplied. Congress, the administration, states, and school districts should take the appropriate steps to ensure that school discipline policies are reflective of and commensurate with the occasionally serious nature of student misconduct – sometimes even arising to criminal conduct yet punished as simple misbehavior. The federal government should support state and local efforts to create threat assessment teams to identify and assist students who need help. The federal government should ensure that school districts have a

reliable central authority or clearinghouse where they can find evidence-based and successful models for school safety measures. These are just a few of the recommendations on which the administration and Congress should continue to work together alongside state and local partners.

With regard to preventing targeted violence, Congress should enact my bipartisan *Threat Assessment, Prevention, and Safety (TAPS) Act*, which has been referred to this committee. Congress should also enact my bipartisan *Extreme Risk Protection Order and Violence Prevention Act* to keep guns out of the hands of dangerous individuals.

In October 2018, I led a bipartisan, bicameral letter to Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos and members of the Federal Commission on School Safety urging the inclusion of a recommendation for the creation of a central clearinghouse with a single authority to coordinate school safety measures among many federal agencies. I believe this central clearinghouse is needed to provide school districts with the tools necessary to improve school safety in an effective, cost-efficient manner, rather than relying on the latest gadget that someone is trying to sell.

I was pleased that the final report included a recommendation that the federal government develop a clearinghouse to assess, identify, and develop best practices in school safety and security. Yet, despite this clear recommendation, no visible progress

has been made to actually implement this central clearinghouse. I urge the committee to work with me to implement in a meaningful and enduring manner a clearinghouse that does not become a static, bureaucratic and inflexible office or resource incapable of meeting the demands of today's needs or the future's needs.

Thank you for the committee's ongoing work on the critical issue of school safety.