



# THE PARKLAND TRAGEDY: EXPERIENCES AND LESSONS LEARNED

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# OBJECTIVES

- Discuss the background of the Marjorie Stoneman Douglas Commission
- Discuss the recommendations of the committee
- Explain the process for identifying and assessing school threats

# MARJORIE STONEMAN DOUGLAS HS PUBLIC SAFETY COMMISSION

- Florida Department of Law Enforcement
- Established during the 2018 legislative session.
  - represents a comprehensive approach to identifying and addressing issues presented by the tragedy that occurred at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida.
  - formed to specifically analyze information from the school shooting and other mass violence incidents in the state and address recommendations and system improvements.

# PARKLAND SHOOTING OVERVIEW

- February 14, 2018
- Marjorie Stoneman Douglas HS
- 14 Students/3 Staff Killed; 17 Wounded



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# NICOLAS CRUZ

## High Level Overview

- 19 years old; former student
- Early as 3 years old-aggression and violent hx
- Multiple Schools-behavioral issues
- Mental health services 11-18
- DCF Involvement
- Law Enforcement Involvement



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# NICOLAS CRUZ

## Key Life Events

- Born 9/24/98; Adopted 2/18/99 (Adoptive Parents married in 2002)
- Younger half-brother adopted @ 2/21/2000
- Adoptive father dies in 2004-Nicholas 5 years old
- Referred to PROMISE Program for vandalism in middle school (2011-2014)
- ESE Center 2014-2016
- Job as cashier 2016
- 1/2016-2/2017 MSDHS
- Family moves 2017-enrolls in other school
- Adoptive mother dies 11/2017; moves in with Deschamps family; altercation moves in with Snead family
- Dave Thomas Education Center 12/15/2017



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# NICHOLAS CRUZ

- Between the time Cruz was 3 years old in January 2002 and the time he was 19 years old in January 2018, there were 69 documented incidents where Cruz threatened someone, engaged in violence, talked about guns or other weapons or engaged in other concerning behavior.



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# NICHOLAS CRUZ

- Law Enforcement Involvement
  - Prior to February 14, 2018, BSO had a total of 43 contacts with the Cruz family.
    - 21 involved Nikolas Cruz alone or both Nikolas and Zachary Cruz.
    - Of the 21 incidents involving Nikolas Cruz, most were minor and warranted no further law enforcement action. Two of the incidents warranted additional follow-up that was not conducted.
    - 22 of the incidents involved only Zachary Cruz.
    - Majority of calls from adoptive mother-fighting, destroying property, out of control



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# NICHOLAS CRUZ

- Law Enforcement Involvement
  - Katherine Blaine called BSO from out of state the day Lynda Cruz died. She reported that Nikolas Cruz had weapons and was supervising his 17 year old brother. This was a request for BSO to conduct a welfare check of Nikolas and Zachary because their mother died that day. No report was written.
  - After the shooting on February 14, Blaine told BSO that Lynda Cruz had confided in her that approximately three months earlier that Nikolas Cruz had knocked out three of her teeth.

# NICHOLAS CRUZ

- Law Enforcement Involvement
  - On November 24, 2017, the PBSO responded to a call at the Deschamps residence. Rocxanne called because Cruz reportedly buried a firearm in her yard. No police report was written and the CAD notes contained little information.
  - On November 28, 2017, the PBSO responded to a call in which Rocxanne alleged Cruz hit her son. A police report was written, but a waiver of prosecution was signed. Notes from the original call for service indicated Cruz said he would leave, go get a gun and come back. The first set of CAD notes also indicated Cruz had just bought a gun from Dick's Sporting Goods the previous week and was going to pick it up. The caller also stated that Cruz had a lot of ammunition and had held a gun to people's heads in the past.
  - Following this incident that Nikolas Cruz moved in with the Snead family.



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# NICHOLAS CRUZ

- Behavioral Health Treatment
  - Much of the information surrounding Cruz's mental health and educational treatment is confidential under Florida and federal law.
  - Cruz's Treatment and/or services by Other Providers.
  - Cruz received extensive mental health treatment and school-based treatment from multiple providers.
  - Over a nine-year period, Cruz regularly received hundreds of hours of therapy sessions
  - Moreover, Cruz also received additional educational services and behavioral care from multiple other providers for many years.
  - To the knowledge of the Commission, Cruz did not receive any treatment in the months immediately preceding the February 14, 2018, shooting.

# NICHOLAS CRUZ

- Behavioral Health
  - Cruz told one student, “I’m so tired of everyone being mean to me, I just can’t take it, I want to shoot up the school.” When the student confronted Cruz about this, Cruz said he was joking. This same student had information about Cruz killing animals for fun.
  - A small number of Cruz’s peers had information about Cruz being suicidal or depressed. Cruz had shown one of his classmates scars on his arm from when he cut himself.
  - The friend with whom Cruz was living attributed some of Cruz’s depression to the death of his mother.
  - Another friend spoke of how Cruz thought it was funny to put his Make America Great Again hat next to the urn of his deceased mother due to her opposing political beliefs.
  - So rampant were the concerns about Cruz that one student who saw Cruz while fleeing MSD commented to him, “I’m surprised you weren’t the one who did this.”



# NICHOLAS CRUZ

- Hatred toward specific races or social groups.
  - Cruz had been known to make statements such as, “I wish all the Jews were dead,” or, in reference to the shooting at the Pulse nightclub, “I’m glad they killed all those gay people.”
  - Another student said he knew that Cruz did not like black people and that he wanted to shoot them. Cruz also expressed an interest in hate groups such as Nazis, Hitler, and the KKK.
  - He was known to use phrases such as “White Power.”
  - Several people spoke of seeing swastikas drawn on his personal belongings.
  - Corroboration of these witness statements was found on the ammunition magazines recovered from Building 12, as they had swastikas etched into them.
  - A review of his cell phone contents included numerous images associated with Nazism and the KKK.
  - Numerous people—mostly fellow students—knew of Cruz to have a history of killing small animals such as squirrels, toads and lizards.



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# NICHOLAS CRUZ

## Violent behavior.

- A bank teller who had extensive contact with Lynda Cruz spoke at length about Cruz threatening to kill Lynda or telling Lynda to kill herself and that Cruz would then burn down the house. She described how Lynda would have bruises on her wrists and, when asked about them, Lynda said that Cruz had fought with Lynda over her purse. Lynda went so far as to tell the bank teller that “if anything happens to me, you know it was Nick.” This bank teller came forward after the shooting to report her observations but did not report anything prior to the shooting.
- Other family friends spoke of Cruz pointing guns at Lynda and threatening her.
- Cruz threatened a fellow student, saying that he would kill her, rape her and hurt her family. A former co-worker of Cruz at the Dollar Tree spoke of an instance when her mother came into the store. The mother attempted to offer some words of wisdom to Cruz due to him leaving MSD. Cruz responded to the mother saying that he could go shoot up the school and he could shoot her as well.
- Neither the Dollar Tree employee nor her mother reported this to anyone until after the February 14 shooting.



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# NICHOLAS CRUZ

- School Discipline Records
  - BCPS documented nearly 70 incidents involving Cruz in its incident-based computer system.
  - BCPS's disciplinary referral system (DMS) also contained nearly 55 school incidents involving Cruz.
  - Much of the school information regarding Cruz is confidential under Florida and federal law because it is part of Cruz's "student record."



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# NICHOLAS CRUZ

- Prior Information Received by the FBI Regarding Cruz's Concerning Behavior
  - Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) soon after the MSD shooting that that FBI had previously received tips concerning Nikolas Cruz.
  - Due to inadequate handling of these tips, the FBI subsequently opened an internal investigation after the MSD tragedy.
  - The first tip was received on the FBI Public Access Line (PAL) on September 25, 2017, from Ben Bennight in Mississippi. Bennight, who was unknown to Cruz, reported a video on YouTube stating, "I'm going to be the next school shooter," made by a user identified as "nikolas cruz." The information was forwarded to the Mississippi FBI office for follow up and the tipster was interviewed. However, it was determined there was not enough information available to positively identify the poster of the video and the tip was closed on October 11, 2017. Efforts to serve legal process on YouTube or Google that could have potentially identified the poster were not made.



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# NICHOLAS CRUZ

- Second call to the FBI PAL was placed on January 5, 2018, by a friend of the Cruz family, Mary Hamel.
  - Hamel had become increasingly concerned about postings Cruz was making on Instagram and feared he would actually follow through on threats to harm others by perpetrating a school shooting. During the thirteen-minute phone call,
  - Hamel provided details of Cruz's gun purchases, animal mutilations, escalating temper and Cruz's Instagram usernames.
  - The tip was closed out after it was labeled as having no lead value.



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# NICHOLAS CRUZ

## Social Media Posts

- “Im going watch them sheep fall fuck antifa I wish to kill as many as I can.”
- “iam going to kill them in the future.”
- “I whana shoot people with my AR-15.”
- “I wanna die Fighting killing shit ton of people.”
- “I am going to kill law enforcement one day they go after the good people.”



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# NICHOLAS CRUZ

- Internet Searches
  - Guns/Weapons
  - School Shooting
  - Columbine Dramas/ Videos made by Virginia Tech Shooter
  - Pornography
  - “is killing people easy”
  - Crime scene cleaner
  - Notes
    - “My life is a mess idk what to do anymore. Everyday I get even more agitated at everyone cause my life is unfair. Everything and everyone is happy except for me I want to kill people but I don't know how I can do it. Walk to a park, get someone to pick me up I just don't know anymore but it will happen soon.”



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# NICHOLAS CRUZ

- Internet Searches
- “My love towards her grows, without her I’m nothing all this madness inside is about to Burst without her I have nothing I wish we could love,I wish we could live,but at the end to her it’s probably nothing, but that’s ok cause I love her,I love you my angel (name redacted) if I don’t die please see me it will bring happiness to me I want to love, I want to be in love with you, forever and ever with no end insight :’) even if I’m raped to death you will always be on my mind that’s how much my love is for you, I see you not as a person but a soul lover a love that will never be broken. I’m in love with you (name redacted) my love. you have been the sweetest, gentle being of my heart I love you. please be with m in the after life my dearest sweetheart :’) I will always dream about you even if I do stupid things your nothing but love in my life I can’t stand a day without you even after I been a worthless trash can.i wish for you to be my will with my everything I leave behind it belongs to you and my brother.the half of the cash goes to you and my brother as my hatred grows my love grows towards to one person my dear love”



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# NICHOLAS CRUZ

- Juvenile Justice
  - PROMISE Program
    - Consistent with Florida's civil citation criteria, applies to youth who commit misdemeanor acts outside of school.
    - Broward County- a juvenile could have multiple in-school PROMISE diversions and multiple out-of-school civil citation diversions, without either system being aware of the multiple diversions.



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# NICHOLAS CRUZ

- Threat Assessment
  - The object of the threat assessment process is to use a behavior-based approach to identify concerning behavior, assess it and act on it as early as possible.
    - Identifying concerning behavior, not necessarily an actual threat
    - Broward County Public Schools (BCPS) mandated set of procedures for violence prevention and threat assessment containing three components.
    - The first two components are learning to recognize warning signs to help prevent violence in the schools before they escalate and training adults in the schools to receive information and take reports from students about potentially threatening situations.
    - The third component of the district's procedures comprises the three-stage Threat Assessment process: (1) Initial Response, (2) Level 1 Screening and (3) Level 2 In-Depth Assessment.
    - The BCPS threat assessment process is formal and, when completed, contains many forms and other writings that become part of the student record.
    - BCPS's threat assessment process is school-based and not operationally overseen at the district level.
  - Level 1 assessment transitioned into a Level 2 assessment....no one interviewed by the Commission knows how or why the Level 2 was initiated, but there is evidence that it happened based on forms in the file.

# NICHOLAS CRUZ

- Educational Services
  - Exceptional Student Education (ESE) from approximately age 3.
  - Individual Education Plan (IEP) that outlined his student goals and also provided him with counseling services provided by the school board.
- District failed was when it provided Cruz erroneous information concerning his options for services at MSDHS. The onus was on the District to seek a court determination if it wanted to force Cruz to attend an alternate school.

# FLORIDA'S BAKER ACT

- The Florida law allowing individuals to be taken into custody for a mental health evaluation went into effect in 1972 and is referred to as the Baker Act. The law was enacted to encourage voluntary mental health care instead of involuntary commitments to long-term psychiatric facilities.
- Prior to the Baker Act, a person as young as 12 years of age could be placed for an indefinite period in a state hospital with no substantial due process.
- Evaluated for a Baker Act was on September 28, 2016, for reportedly threatening self-harm.



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# FLORIDA'S BAKER ACT

- The Baker Act evaluation process begins when an individual that meets specific criteria refuses voluntary examination.
- Criteria:
  1. There has to be a reason to believe that the person has a diagnosable mental illness, meaning they have to be diagnosed, or thought to be diagnosed, with something like schizophrenia, bipolar disorder or major depression. (Being under the influence of drugs or being considered developmentally disabled are not causes for involuntary examination or placement.)
  2. They individual refuses voluntary examination, or, because of situational circumstances, the referring authority is unable to determine whether an examination is necessary.
  3. Without care, the person is likely to suffer from neglect resulting in a real and present threat of substantial harm that can't be avoided through the help of others, or there is a substantial likelihood that without care or treatment the person will cause bodily harm to self or others in the near future, as evidenced by their recent behavior.

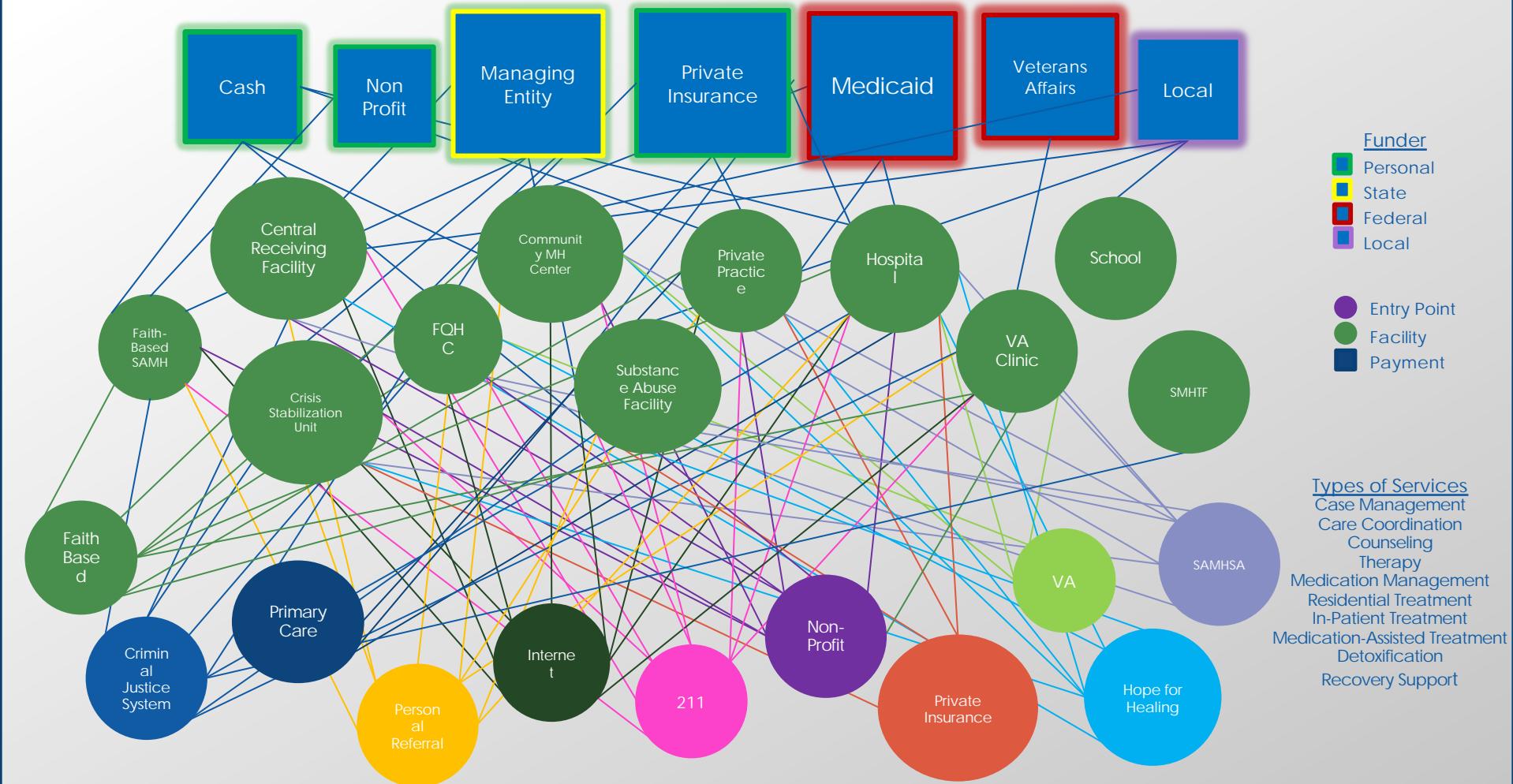


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# FLORIDA'S BAKER ACT

- An involuntary examination can be initiated by one of three ways:
  1. A circuit court judge can enter an ex parte order based upon sworn testimony that directs a police officer to pick up the individual and take them to a Baker Act facility.
  2. A sworn law enforcement officer has the authority to involuntarily initiate Baker Act proceedings by examination based upon what they observe.
  3. A physician, clinical psychologist, psychiatric nurse or a clinical social worker (as defined by statute) may execute a professional certificate stating that they have examined an individual in the previous 48 hours, and they believe the individual meets the criteria for an examination.

# Florida's Behavioral Health System



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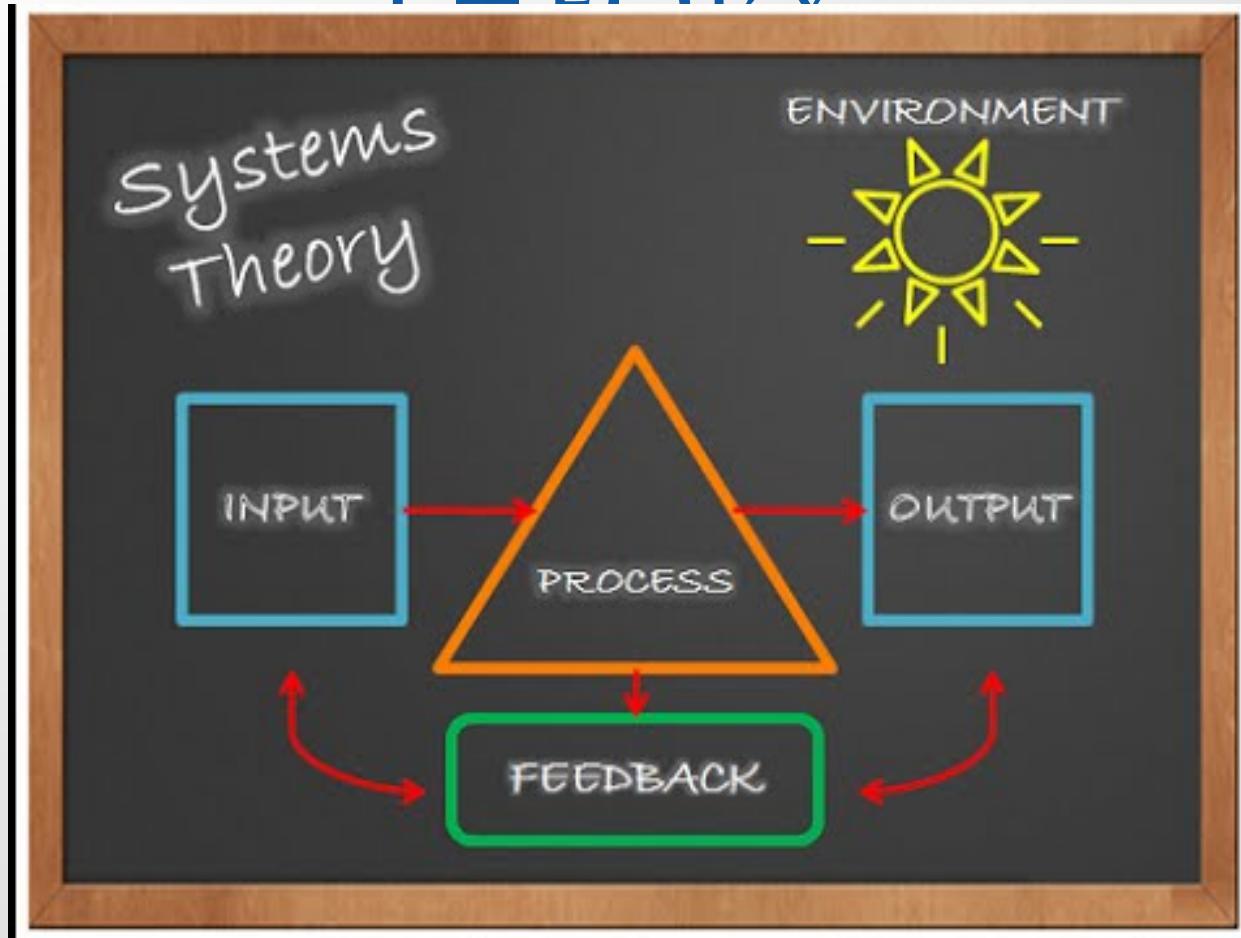
# REUNIFICATION AND MASS CASUALTY DEATH NOTIFICATION

- Family Perspectives
- Law Enforcement Perspectives

# LAW ENFORCEMENT AND SCHOOL POLICIES

- Active Assailant
- Notification and Reunification
- Drills

# SYSTEMS THEORY IN THEORY



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# SYSTEM'S THEORY IN THEORY... MISSED OPPORTUNITIES



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# COMMISSION AND OPPOSITION

- Mandate and Composition
- Southern Poverty Law Center

# LESSONS LEARNED

- Marjorie Stoneman Public Safety Commission
- National Council Medical Director Institute Report: Mass Violence in America

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