



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on February 27, 2018

## Sheriff Criticized for Handling of Florida School Shooting; Governor Launches Probe

Unlike some of his deputies who showed up at the scene of the Valentine's Day school shooting in Parkland, Florida, Broward County Sheriff Scott Israel (shown) is coming under fire. In his case, though, it's because of his department's many missteps both before and during the massacre — failures so spectacular that Governor Rick Scott has launched an investigation into the Broward Sheriff's Office.



On February 14, 19-year-old Nikolas Cruz allegedly opened fire in Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, killing 17 people and wounding 16.

Soon after the incident, it emerged that Broward Deputy Scot Peterson, who had been assigned to guard the school, had remained outside throughout the shooting spree. After reviewing video evidence of Peterson's inaction, Israel suspended him without pay, saying he should have gone in and "addressed the killer. Killed the killer." Peterson then resigned, and subsequently retired.

By Friday night, Coral Springs police officers who had arrived on the scene during the shooting were telling reporters that not just Peterson but [two or more other Broward County deputies](#) had remained outside, not even entering the building with the Coral Springs officers. According to CNN, "The deputies had their pistols drawn and were behind their vehicles, the sources said, and not one of them had gone into the school." Two Broward deputies who arrived later did join the Coral Springs officers, the latter said.

During a Thursday-night vigil, Coral Springs City Manager Mike Goodman, whose officers were peeved over what they perceived to be the Broward deputies' unhelpfulness, confronted Israel in public about the officers' allegations. By the next day, however, the two men had apparently patched things up, with Goodman issuing a statement saying, "I can assure you that our departments have a good working relationship and the utmost respect for each other."

Israel, for his part, isn't commenting on the allegations, saying his office "will do an accurate, meticulous investigation" and then act accordingly.

Peterson's attorney argued in a [statement](#) Monday that Israel had in fact jumped to a conclusion about Peterson rather than waiting for an investigation. He said Peterson had acted exactly as he'd been trained to do given that he believed the gunfire was coming from outside the building. The sheriff's office, he wrote, "trains its officers that in the event of outdoor gunfire one is to seek cover and assess the situation in order to communicate what one observes with other law enforcement."

"The allegations that Peterson was a coward and that his performance, under the circumstances, failed to meet the standards of police officers are patently untrue," the attorney stated.

The Broward Sheriff's Office has also been accused of ignoring warning signs that Cruz was likely to become a school shooter. The office had received at least 18 calls about incidents involving Cruz, and it,



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along with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Florida Department of Children and Families, “received advance and specific warnings that Cruz was dangerous and might shoot up a school,” reported the [South Florida Sun-Sentinel](#). “A caller on Nov. 30, for example, told the sheriff’s office that Cruz was collecting guns and knives and ‘could be a school shooter in the making.’”

During a Sunday interview with CNN’s Jake Tapper, Israel defended his office’s handling of the Cruz calls and the actual shooting, even going so far as to tout his “amazing leadership” of the department. Despite calls for his resignation, Israel declared he would not quit, saying essentially that leaders aren’t responsible for the actions of their subordinates.

Hours later, Governor Scott directed the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) to investigate the Broward cops’ handling of the case. “There must be an independent investigation and that is why I asked the FDLE Commissioner to immediately start this process,” Scott said in a statement. Israel promised full cooperation with the investigation.

Indeed, as big a story as the shooting itself was, related government mistakes are perhaps an even bigger one. Government failed in its primary duty of protecting the public both by ignoring repeated warnings and by failing to act decisively once the incident had begun. As Broward County Commissioner Michael Udine put it, “Everybody who had a chance here failed our kids and our community.”

Image: Screenshot of a [Phoenix Fox 10 news report on youtube](#)



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