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Gov. Scott Signs the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Act

Remarks as Prepared for Delivery

Good afternoon. I want to thank everyone for being here today. On Valentine's Day, we lost 14 of our kids, and three of our teachers. On a day that is supposed to celebrate love, they were brutally murdered in cold blood. Families were shattered. And unfortunately, this wasn't the first time our state has been rocked like this. In 2016, 49 innocent victims were murdered at Pulse Night Club and early last year another five people were killed by a gunman at the Ft. Lauderdale Airport.

I cannot possibly convey to you the grief that I have seen and felt in attending funerals and spending time with these families. The hardest thing I have ever had to do as Governor is try to find the words to console a parent who lost their child. There are just are no words and I truly cannot imagine the grief of losing a child.

Some of the Parkland families are here with me today, and I'm so grateful that they could come. We just had the opportunity to meet and I have spent the last few weeks getting to know these families.

I want to commend the legislature for getting a bill to my desk in such a short amount of time. And I want to point out that this is a far different way of operating than the typical inefficiency we see from the federal government in Washington.
Politics in D.C. seems to always get in the way of actually enacting measures that will help American families.

As a businessman, I have always rejected the idea that government has to be slow. Today should serve as an example to the entire country that government can – and must – move fast. I said at the beginning of this process less than three weeks ago that we have to be very careful as we balance our individual rights with our need for public safety.

Immediately following the shooting, I called emergency meetings with experts in law enforcement, education and mental health and developed a comprehensive action plan quickly after this tragedy. Simultaneously, the Florida Senate and the Florida House of Representatives began working on their ideas on how to make our schools safer. We all had lots of ideas. We had some shared ideas. And obviously, we have some very different ideas.

On Wednesday, before the bill even passed, reporters began asking me if I was going to sign it or veto it. But, I wanted to spend the time reading it line by line. I've spent the

last few days reading over the bill, talking to some of these families, talking to my family, and praying about this decision.

I called on the legislature to give me a bill that will allow us to make our schools far safer, allowing for a much greater law enforcement presence and for hardening our school buildings… this bill does that.

I called on the legislature to give me a bill which provides more funding for mental health services… this bill does that.

I called on the legislature to give me a bill which gives us the ability to seek restraining orders to keep guns away from people with mental health problems and from people who are a danger to themselves and others… this bill does that.

I asked for a bill which would ban bump stocks and raise the age to purchase a gun from 18 to 21, … and this bill does that.

However, there are things in this bill that I oppose and I have been pretty open about that. I still think law enforcement officers should be the ones to protect our schools. I've heard all the arguments for teachers to be armed, and while this bill was significantly changed on this topic, I am still not persuaded. I am glad, however, that the plan in this bill is not mandatory, which means that it will be up to locally elected officials. I think local control is very important. If counties do not want this, they can simply say no.

I'm going to give local school and law enforcement officials time to determine if they want to use this money. I have already talked to the Legislature about redirecting funds that aren't used for this program for more law enforcement officers at our schools. Let me be clear – if we veto the funding for this program now, this funding cannot be used for additional law enforcement officers this year. I also do not believe in increased waiting periods for law abiding citizens. It wouldn't have had an impact on this killer.

There has been vigorous debate on all of these issues. I believe every side has had their chance to share their views, and that is what truly makes our democracy great. At the beginning of this process, I said that we would all have to give a little and make compromises, and that includes me. I know that many wanted more gun control than what is included in this bill. And I know that many believe this bill has too much gun control. I respect the sincerity and the validity of both of these viewpoints.

Ryan Petty, the father of Alaina who was killed at Marjory Stoneman Douglas, said, "As families, we have different opinions and different backgrounds, but we came together and are united behind this legislation…"

To see these amazing families come together on a solution is powerful. And like these families, the members of the legislature and I have different opinions and backgrounds, but we needed to come together to help find a solution.

So, after reviewing the entire bill, I had to ask myself: Will this bill make a huge investment and dramatically improve school safety, in the hopes of never seeing another tragedy like this again? Will this bill provide more funding to treat the mentally ill? Will this bill give us far more tools to keep guns away from people who should not have them? The answer to all three is yes. And, that is why I am signing the legislation today.

I want to conclude on one final point: I know the debate on all these issues will continue, and that's healthy in our democracy. People are passionate in their beliefs and they should be. But, we should not insult or disparage each other. We should work together to make our schools safe for our kids. We have a lot of work ahead of us in order to enact these reforms and make our schools safer. This is a time for all of us to come together, roll up our sleeves, and get it done.

Before I sign the bill, I would like to thank a few people who made today possible: Andy Pollack and Ryan Petty: thank you for your efforts to get this bill done. You have been walking the halls of the capitol for days fighting to get this bill across the finish line. You have inspired all of us. Thank you for having the strength to fight as you continue to grieve. To the families of all the victims, including Tony Montalto, the father of Gina, and Gena Hoyer, the mother of Luke, who are also with us today: I know there is nothing we could ever do to ease your pain, but know that through the passage of this legislation, the State of Florida will forever honor the incredible impact your loved ones have had on our state. They will never be forgotten.

As Andy Pollack has said, we want him, and all of these parents, to be the last fathers – and mothers – to lose their children in a school shooting. And, we want the families of the fallen teachers to be the last to lose their loved ones in our schools. Their actions, like those of Coach Aaron Feis, show how much they care about kids. They deserve to be safe.

To the students of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School: You made your voices heard. You didn't let up. And, you fought until there was change. You helped change our state. You made a difference.

Thank you to Senate President Joe Negron, President Designate Bill Galvano, House Speaker Richard Corcoran and Speaker Designate Jose Oliva for your hard work on this bill. I have had the opportunity to work with President Negron and Speaker Corcoran for many years. And while this was the last piece of legislation we worked on together, it is certainly the most meaningful. This is also the very first bill I am signing into law this year. I also want to specifically recognize Senator Book, Senator Rader, Representative Moskowitz and Representative Jacobs who represent the Parkland community. Thank you for your input and ideas throughout this process.

Every student in Florida has the right to learn in a safe environment, and every parent has the right to send their kids to school knowing that they will return safely at the end of

the day. Today, I am signing bipartisan legislation that helps us achieve that. Thank you.