

School shooter was recommended for commitment

MIAMI (AP) — Officials were so concerned about the mental stability of the student accused of last month's Florida school massacre they decided he should be forcibly committed.

But the recommendation was never acted upon.

A commitment under the law would have made it more difficult if not impossible for Nikolas Cruz to obtain a gun legally.

Cruz is accused of the shooting rampage that killed 14 students and three school employees at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland on Feb. 14. In addition, 17 people were wounded.

But more than a year earlier, documents in the criminal case against Nikolas Cruz and obtained by The Associated Press show school officials and a sheriff's deputy recommend-

ed in September 2016 that Cruz be involuntarily committed for a mental evaluation.

The documents, which are part of Cruz's criminal case in the shooting, show he had written the word "kill" in a notebook, told a classmate he wanted to buy a gun and use it, and had cut his arm supposedly in anger because he had broken up with a girlfriend. He also told another student he had drunk gasoline and was throwing up. Calls had even been made to the FBI about the possibility of Cruz using a gun at school.

The documents were provided by a psychological assessment service initiated by Cruz's

mother called Henderson Behavioral Health. The documents show a high school resource officer who was also a sheriff's deputy and two school counselors recommended in September 2016 that Cruz be committed for mental evaluation under Florida's Baker Act. That law allows for involuntary commitment for mental health examination for at least three days.



CRUZ

Such an involuntary commitment would also have been a high obstacle if not a complete barrier to legally obtaining a firearm, such as the AR-15 rifle used in the Stoneman Douglas massacre Feb. 14, authorities say.

There is no evidence Cruz

was ever committed. Coincidentally, the school resource officer who recommended Cruz be "Baker Acted" was Scot Peterson — the same Broward Sheriff's Office deputy who resigned amid accusations he failed to respond to the shooting by staying outside the building where the killings occurred.

David S. Weinstein, a former federal prosecutor, said an involuntary commitment would have been a huge red flag had Cruz attempted to buy a firearm legally.

"If he had lied, hopefully the verification of the form would have pulled up the commitment paperwork," Weinstein said.

The documents do not say why Cruz was not committed under the Baker Act or whether he may not have qualified for

other reasons. The law allows a law enforcement officer such as Peterson to initiate commitment under the Baker Act.

Cruz, 19, is charged in a 34-count indictment with killing 17 people and wounding 17 others in the attack. He faces the death penalty if convicted, but his public defender Melisa McNeill has said he would plead guilty in return for a life prison sentence.

Other red flags have also surfaced, including calls to the FBI about Cruz's potential to become a school shooter and numerous visits by county law enforcement officials to his home - both before his mother died in November and after, when he lived briefly with a family friend in Palm Beach County.

Again, very little was done.

Will your vote be hacked?

Security crucial as election season looms

SPRINGFIELD, ILL. (AP) — With the Illinois primary on Tuesday, state election officials are beefing up cyber defenses and scanning for possible intrusions into voting systems and voter registration rolls.

They have good reason: Two years ago, Illinois was the lone state known to have its state election system breached in a hacking effort that ultimately targeted 21 states. Hackers believe to be connected to Russia penetrated the state's voter rolls, viewing data on some 76,000 Illinois voters, although there is no indication any information was changed.

Since then, Illinois election officials have added firewalls, installed software designed to prevent intrusions and shifted staffing to focus on the threats. The state has been receiving reg-

ular cyber scans from the federal government to identify potential weak spots and has asked the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to conduct a comprehensive risk assessment.

"It's not something where you ever feel completely safe," Matt Dietrich, spokesman for the Illinois State Board of Elections. "It's something where you feel like you're doing your best to protect against what could happen in a cyberattack."

Federal intelligence agencies determined the attempted hacking of state elections systems in 2016 primarily targeted voter registration systems, not actual voting machines or vote tallying.

Gaining access to electronic voter rolls can do as much damage, giving hackers the ability to change

names, addresses or polling places. Confusion, long lines and delays in reporting election results would follow, all of which undermines confidence in elections.

Cybersecurity experts say it's crucial for all 50 states to shore up vulnerabilities in those systems now, with this year's midterm elections underway and the 2020 presidential election on the horizon.

J. Alex Halderman, director of the University of Michigan's Center for Computer Security and Society, said many of the same weaknesses present in 2016 remain.

"I think it's only a matter of time before we suffer a devastating attack on our election systems unless our federal and state governments act quickly," he said.

The federal Help



Warren County residents line up to vote at the courthouse for the 2016 presidential election. Local voters will head to the polls three times in 2018, making election security an emphasis in an age of cyberattacks.

America Vote Act, passed two years after the messy presidential recount in Florida, requires states to have a centralized statewide voter registration list, but states vary in how they implement it.

The chief concern surrounding voter registra-

tion systems and the growing use of electronic poll books to check in voters at polling places is how they interact with other internet-connected systems.

Electronic poll books allow polling place workers to verify a person's reg-

istration and related information electronically, rather than having to rely on large paper files.

A downside is that the e-poll books might use a network to connect to a voter registration system, providing a potential opening for hackers.



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Smith seeks re-election for Register of Deeds

My name is Terry K. Smith and I am running for re-election for the office of Warren County Register of Deeds.

My purpose is to continue helping the people of Warren County as I have in the past.

I graduated from Central High School and attended Middle Tennessee State University. I have been certified thru County Technical Assistance Service (CTAS) and the University of Tennessee with over 200 hours of classes to receive my certification. I have to maintain 16 hours of classroom work each year to keep my certification.

Since being the Register of Deeds I installed computers, we do email to offices of Title Searchers and attorneys, take payments by

credit cards, and recently added e-filing (electronic filing). You can go to USTitleSearch.com. I send micro-filming to state archives and a copy is kept in a deposit box in a local bank. I have a disaster plan, also kept in deposit box, as required by computer auditors.

I am a member of Westwood Church of Christ, County Officials Association of Tennessee (COAT), and have been president of Middle Tennessee Registers Association on two occasions.

Experience counts. Vote for Terry Smith for Register of Deeds on May 1. Your vote is greatly appreciated. Early Voting will be April 11th thru April 26th.

Paid for by Terry Smith