

Team,

I write today, grieving with our country for all of the families that have been impacted by yesterday's tragic school shooting in Florida. This is a note that should not have to be written... a note of heartbreak over lives lost in a place where they should be safe.

But sadly, we find ourselves having to write letters like this far too often.

Because of the horrific actions of one individual, seventeen innocent lives were lost, and numerous more individuals were injured. Many more will bear scars beneath the surface for the rest of their lives.

Like many of you whom I have spoken with today, I am haunted by the image on the front of seemingly every newspaper this morning. Those parents could be any of us. But they should be none of us. Events like yesterday's should not happen.

We have to do better.

We must first comfort those who grieve. They must know their nation stands with them, and will not stand for the pain they suffered happening again.

But we must also start an earnest conversation -- in our communities, in our houses of worship, in our homes -- about why these tragedies keep happening, and focus on finding solutions that will truly work. We need to examine our approaches to mental health, to engage law enforcement and support students, educators and school building leaders.

The work our Department is doing in the Office of Safe and Healthy Students (OSHS) is critically important. OSHS exists to serve states and school communities by providing assistance on topics that affect the well-being, health and safety of our nation's young people.

I know each of you joins me in standing ready to serve as a partner with the Parkland community and the Broward County School District in the coming weeks as they work to recover from this tragedy. We cannot rest as a nation until every child and every parent in America can feel confident that their school environment is a safe and nurturing place to learn.

In the meantime, we should hug our loved ones, tell them how thankful we are to have them in our lives and continue to support and pray for all those who grieve in Parkland.

Betsy