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SECURITY

Florida's Guardian Program & What
Schools Need to Know

**Creating Safe Learning Environments
with Trained Security Professionals**

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Introduction

The safety of students and staff is a top priority for Florida schools. The state's Guardian Program was created to enhance school security by training and deploying armed personnel to respond to active threats. This guide outlines everything schools in the St. Pete/Tampa market need to know about the Guardian Program, compliance with state-mandated security requirements, and how PalAmerican can help schools implement and maintain these critical safety measures.



Understanding Florida's Guardian Program

Why the Guardian Program Was Created

The tragic shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in 2018, where 17 lives were lost, led to the creation of the Chris Hixon, Coach Aaron Feis, and Coach Scott Beigel Guardian Program. The Florida Legislature established this initiative as part of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Act to ensure schools have highly trained personnel ready to respond to security threats.



Recent Developments in School Safety and Violence

Over the past decade, the United States has witnessed a troubling increase in school-related violent incidents, particularly shootings, prompting nationwide concern and legislative action.

The Rising Increase of School Violence

While overall school crime rates have seen fluctuations, specific types of violence, notably school shootings, have escalated. Data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) indicates that in the 2020–21 school year, there were 20 homicides and 17 suicides among students ages 5–18 at school, totaling 37 school-associated violent deaths. Additionally, from 2000 through 2022, there were 328 casualties (131 killed and 197 wounded) in active shooter incidents at elementary and secondary schools across the nation. nces.ed.gov

In the 2023–24 school year, the Educator's School Safety Network reported a 49% increase in violent incidents in schools compared to the previous year, excluding false reports like swatting. This underscores a concerning trend where actual acts of violence are becoming more frequent on school grounds. eschoolsafety.org

School Violence Trends in Florida

Florida has not been immune to these challenges. Between 1966 and July 22, 2024, Florida recorded 155 K-12 school shootings, ranking third highest in the nation. The tragic shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in 2018, where 17 lives were lost, served as a pivotal moment for the state, highlighting the urgent need for enhanced school safety measures.

schoolsafety.org+edweek.org+axios.com+statista.com+k12ssdb.org+1

Florida's Legislative Response

In response to the increasing incidents of school violence, particularly the 2018 tragedy, the Florida Legislature enacted the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Act. This comprehensive legislation introduced several key measures:

Establishment of the Guardian Program: Allows school staff to be trained and armed to respond to active shooter situations.

Mental Health Initiatives: Increased funding for mental health services in schools to identify and support at-risk students.

Enhanced Security Measures: Mandated the presence of school resource officers and the implementation of stricter security protocols on campuses.

These efforts reflect Florida's commitment to addressing the multifaceted issue of school violence through legislative action, improved mental health support, and strengthened security measures.

Who Can Become a Guardian?

Guardians are school district employees or individuals specifically hired to serve as school security personnel. They can be:

School employees, including teachers, who volunteer for additional security responsibilities.

Dedicated security personnel employed by the school district or charter schools.

Contracted private security guards who hold Class "D" and Class "G" licenses and complete the Guardian training program.

Guardian Program Training & Certification

Why the Guardian Program Was Created

To qualify as a Guardian, individuals must complete an intensive training program administered by local sheriff's offices. The requirements include:

144 total hours of training, consisting of:

- 80 hours of firearms instruction, modeled after law enforcement training and requiring an 85% pass rate.
- 16 hours of precision pistol instruction.
- 16 hours of active shooter and assailant scenario training.
- 8 hours of defensive tactics.
- 8 hours of discretionary shooting instruction using simulators.
- 4 hours of legal instruction.
- 12 hours of nationally recognized diversity training.

Psychological evaluation, background checks, and drug testing.

Annual recertification training and weapons inspection.



Funding & Implementation

The Florida Legislature allocates funds for training, background checks, and stipends for school employees who volunteer as Guardians.

Schools can apply for reimbursement through the Florida Department of Education.

Charter schools can contract with sheriff's offices in other counties if their local sheriff does not offer a Guardian program.

How Schools Benefit from the Guardian Program

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Enhanced Security with Trained, Armed Guardians

- Immediate response to active threats on school grounds.
- Integration with local law enforcement for coordinated emergency response.
- A visible deterrent to potential attackers.

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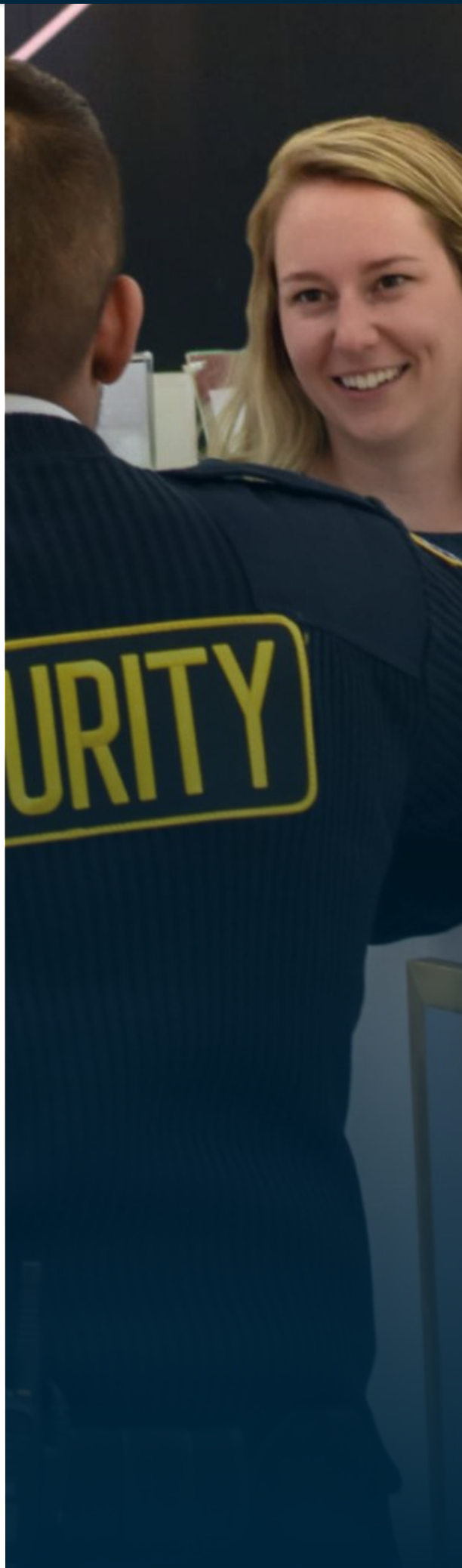
Improved Access Control & Visitor Management

- Keeping unauthorized individuals off school property.
- Monitoring entry and exit points for security threats.
- Requiring all visitors to comply with school safety policies.

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Compliance with State Safety Mandates

- Florida law requires every school to have a Safe-School Officer, which can be a Guardian, School Resource Officer (SRO), or School Safety Officer.
- Guardians provide an additional security presence to supplement existing SROs and law enforcement.
- Schools must maintain annual compliance with training and firearm qualification.



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Why Partner with PalAmerican for Guardian Program Implementation?

PalAmerican provides schools with two flexible solutions to enhance safety and comply with the Guardian Program requirements:

Consultation, Program Development & Training:

Schools that want to develop their own in-house Guardian Program can rely on PalAmerican's expertise. We offer consultation services to help schools establish security protocols, train staff, and build a fully compliant program tailored to their needs.

Expert Consultation: Our security experts guide schools through the process of implementing the Guardian Program to comply with state regulations.

Comprehensive Training: We work with local sheriff's offices for support. Guardians receive superior training beyond the minimum requirements.

Ongoing Support & Security Assessments: Regular security audits and emergency preparedness planning to maintain school safety.

Customized Security Solutions: Tailored strategies to enhance access control, crisis response, and emergency drills.

On-Site Guardian & Comprehensive Security Services:

Schools can also hire PalAmerican's fully trained security professionals to serve as on-site Guardians. In addition to meeting the state's Guardian Program requirements, PalAmerican officers can provide additional security services, such as mobile patrols, security camera monitoring, weapons detection, and other cutting-edge security technologies. We offer scalable solutions ranging from a single Guardian officer to a full, comprehensive security program.

PalAmerican is committed to helping schools in the St. Pete/Tampa market enhance their security posture. Whether your school is looking to build its own Guardian Program or seeking a complete security partnership, PalAmerican is here to support you.



Take Action Today

School safety is not a luxury—it is a necessity. If your school is considering implementing the Guardian Program or looking to enhance existing security measures, PalAmerican is here to help.

Schedule a Discovery Call

Contact us today to discuss your school's security needs. Our team is ready to provide expert guidance, training, and ongoing support to create a safe learning environment for your students and staff. Get in touch with PalAmerican Security to learn how we can help your school build a safer future.

Contact Us

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