

As state Senate hearings begin

Uvalde mayor accuses Texas officials of coverup in mass shooting at Robb Elementary

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On Tuesday, Uvalde Mayor Don McLaughlin accused Texas authorities of withholding information about last month's mass shooting at Robb Elementary. McLaughlin accused Governor Greg Abbott's Department of Public Safety (DPS) of selectively leaking information in an effort to scapegoat local police and cover up the role of state police in standing by for more than an hour while an 18-year-old gunman murdered 19 children and two teachers on May 24.

At a City Council meeting, McLaughlin, like Abbott a Republican, accused the director of DPS, Col. Steven McCraw, of deliberately releasing certain information and withholding other facts so as to whitewash his agency's response to the massacre.

McLaughlin made his angry accusation the same day that the Republican-controlled state Senate, meeting in the state capital of Austin, began a several day public hearing on the horrific assault.

McCraw, who is heading up the official investigation, told the Senate panel that the police response to the Uvalde attack was an "abject failure." He said the police could have stopped the shooting within minutes if Uvalde School District Police Chief Pete Arredondo had acted more decisively.

"Three minutes after the subject entered the West building, there was a sufficient number of armed officers wearing body armor to isolate, distract and neutralize the subject. The only thing stopping a hallway of dedicated officers from entering Room 111 and 112 was the on-scene commander, who decided to place the lives of officers before the lives of children," McCraw said.

At the Uvalde City Council meeting, meanwhile, McLaughlin said McCraw's selective leaking of

information "continues to create chaos in our community and keeps the whole truth from coming out."

The mayor said he requested body camera video from all agencies that responded to the shooting and has not received any.

"McCraw has continued to whether you want to call it lie, leak, mislead or misstate information in order to distance his own troopers and Rangers from the response," McLaughlin said. "Every briefing he leaves out the number of his own officers and Rangers that were on-scene that day.

"Col. McCraw has an agenda, and it is not to present a full report on what happened and give factual answers on what happened to this community," he added.

According to McLaughlin, none of the state or federal entities with information about the investigation—the DPS, the Texas legislature, the Uvalde County District Attorney's office, the FBI—have briefed Uvalde city officials about their findings.

McLaughlin noted that officers from at least eight law enforcement agencies were on the scene in the hallway outside of the classrooms where the shooting took place. He said he was supposed to receive a daily briefing from authorities since the tragedy first occurred but has heard nothing. He denounced as false the state's claims that local police have refused to cooperate with the investigation.

State Senator Roland Gutierrez, a Democrat representing Uvalde County, filed a lawsuit against the DPS on Wednesday, arguing that the agency violated the Texas Public Information Act by ignoring his request for information on the shooting.

"In the wake of the senseless tragedy, the people of

Uvalde and Texas have demanded answers from their government. To date, they have been met with lies, misstatements, and shifts of blame,” the lawsuit states.

The finger-pointing between various authorities comes as further details about the police response underscore the true horror of what occurred on May 24. In the weeks since the shooting, the victims’ families and others in the community have demanded transparency and accountability from officials. Different authorities have shared conflicting information about who was in charge and offered a litany of excuses as to why officers did not intervene sooner.

Here are some key points from what has thus far been released to the public:

- Multiple officers from the DPS—up to eight, at one point—were inside the school at various times while the shooter was barricaded in the two classrooms. Many left the scene to perform other duties, such as evacuating children, after seeing the number of officers already inside. At one point, a DPS special agent said officers needed “to go in” if kids were still inside. Another officer responded that “whoever is in charge” would determine when officers intervened.

- Some officers on the scene seemed to believe that Arredondo, who at times issued orders directing officers to evacuate students from other classrooms, was the on-site commander of the police response. However, Arredondo, who heads only the local school police, said he did not believe he was in charge of the overall response of the various law enforcement agencies.

- No security footage from inside the school showed police officers attempting to open the doors to Classrooms 111 and 112, which were connected by an adjoining door. Arredondo previously claimed he tried to open one door, and another group of officers tried to open another but that the doors were reinforced and impenetrable. The *Texas Tribune* reported that no attempt to open either of the doors was caught in the security footage it reviewed.

- Within the first minutes of the law enforcement response, an officer said the halligan, a firefighting breaching tool, was on site, it but was not brought into the school until an hour after the first officers entered the building. For unknown reasons, police did not use it and instead waited for master keys to unlock the doors.

- According to a law enforcement transcript, police had access to four ballistic shields inside the school during the standoff with the shooter. The first shield arrived nearly an hour before officers stormed the classrooms.

- School district police Officer Ruben Ruiz—whose wife, teacher Eva Mireles, was killed in the attack—arrived on the scene telling other officers, “she says she is shot.” When Ruiz protested the inactivity of others on the scene and attempted to enter the room himself, he was detained, and his firearm taken from him.

At Tuesday’s state Senate hearing, many senators questioned why officers from the DPS, a much larger organization who were on the scene did not take control. McCraw’s only response was to declare that the local school police chief was in charge, and police protocol prevented any challenge to his authority.



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