

Texas public safety director claims state police “did not fail” in response to Uvalde massacre

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Amid calls for his resignation by victims’ families and other public officials, Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) Director Steven McCraw told grieving relatives that his agency “did not fail the community” of Uvalde during the school shooting in May which claimed the lives of 19 children and two teachers.

“If DPS as an institution failed the families, failed the school, or failed the community of Uvalde, then absolutely, I need to go,” McCraw said at a Thursday meeting of the Texas Public Safety Commission. “But I can tell you this right now: DPS as an institution right now did not fail the community, plain and simple.”

McCraw’s appearance at Thursday’s public meeting provided the first update on the DPS investigation in weeks, although little new information was revealed. For months, the families of the children killed in the shooting have demanded transparency and accountability from McCraw and other police agencies, accusing the DPS of withholding information and trying to minimize its culpability.

Almost 400 officers from DPS and 22 other law enforcement agencies responded to the incident at Robb Elementary; multiple officers were on the scene within minutes of the first gunshots, but police waited 77 minutes—in direct violation of law enforcement’s active shooter protocol and training—before engaging the gunman, 18-year-old Salvador Ramos, in the pair of classrooms where he carried out his massacre.

McCraw’s comments came moments after several of the victims’ families demanded he resign. McCraw had previously vowed to “tender (his) resignation to the governor” if his department was found to have any responsibility related to the shooting and the failed police response.

“If you’re a man of your word then you would retire,” Brett Cross, the uncle of 10-year-old victim

Uziah Garcia, told McCraw. “But unfortunately it doesn’t seem like you’re going to do that because you keep talking in circles.”

“It’s been five months and three days since my son, his classmates and his teachers were murdered,” said Cross, who was helping raise his nephew before he died in the shooting.

But while days and weeks pass, Cross said, “Several numbers remain the same: It was 77 minutes that 91 of you all’s officers waited outside while our children were slaughtered.”

Jesse Rizzo, whose 9-year-old niece Jacklyn Cazares was among the victims, told PBS the misleading comments from police and overall refusal to take responsibility has compounded Uvalde’s grief and has generated mistrust in law enforcement.

“The aftermath that came after that was absolutely unacceptable, hurtful, painful,” Rizzo said. “Every single time seemed like lie after lie, disinformation.”

At Thursday’s meeting, McCraw attempted to further distance his department from the shooting, claiming the gunman was only able to gain access to the school because a teacher had propped open an exterior door with a rock. The teacher returned to shut the door, but it did not lock, McCraw said.

Thursday marked the DPS Director’s first public testimony about the mass shooting since June when he told a state Senate committee the shooting response was an “abject failure”—but placed blame largely on local and school district police, particularly school officer Pedro “Pete” Arredondo, who state authorities say was the incident commander at the scene of the shooting.

Arredondo, who has denied he was in that role, was one of five school district officers at Robb Elementary, while DPS had 91 personnel respond to the

shooting—the largest number except for the US Border Patrol, according to a July report by a state House of Representatives investigative committee.

The rest of the school police were suspended amid protests after it was revealed that a new campus security officer hired by the district was a former state police officer who was under investigation for her actions during the shooting.

The DPS has faced mounting scrutiny for its role in the response to the tragedy, beginning as its initial narrative of events was disproved within days of the bloodshed and further expanding when body camera footage revealed a DPS trooper arrived at Robb Elementary earlier than officials acknowledged publicly.

In fact, footage shows that DPS Sergeant Juan Maldonado arrived with the first contingent of officers from the city and school police departments. Maldonado was seen hanging back at a doorway, not entering the building, as gunfire rang out.

McCraw said a criminal investigation into the police response to the shooting, led by the Texas Rangers, would conclude by the end of the year but offered no indication as to whether the findings would result in charges against any of the nearly 400 officers who went to the school. So far, only two DPS officers have been fired in response to their actions at the scene and others have been placed on leave.

According to agency officials, at least seven DPS officers have been under investigation, with Maldonado being served with termination papers last week and Ranger Chris Kindell being suspended.



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