

Families denounce Uvalde report whitewashing police response to 2022 school shooting

Kevin Reed
9 March 2024

Families of the victims of the Uvalde school massacre are outraged by a report released on Thursday that exonerates local law enforcement for their disastrous response to the mass shooting that resulted in the death of 19 students and two teachers and the wounding of 17 others.

The 182-page report was commissioned by the City of Uvalde and was produced by Jesse Prado, an Austin-based investigator and former police detective, who was hired to review the local response to the shooting at Robb Elementary School on May 24, 2022.

At a special meeting convened to review the results of the city's two-year investigation, parents and others erupted when Prado said that "there was no evidence of serious acts of misconduct in direct violation of the Uvalde Police Department policies." While Prado did not mention by name any of the officers during his public appearance, 29 local officers named in the report are listed as "exonerated" and having acted in "good faith."

Veronica Mata, whose ten-year-old daughter Tess was killed in the shooting, said:

You said that they did it in good faith. You call that good faith? They stood there 77 minutes and waited after they got call after call that kids were still alive in there. We're going to stand here and we're going to keep fighting for our own, because nobody else is going to do it.

Kimberly Mata-Rubio, whose daughter Lexi was

killed, said:

I want you to think about the people that you love most in this world: your children, a spouse, a parent. You think about them huddled together in a dark room with a deranged person with an AR-15. Somebody calls 911. Help is on the way. Are these the people that you want responding to your loved ones? Guaranteed, it's not.

Prado, in the face of an eruption of anger and disgust from those in attendance, walked out of the meeting after he concluded his remarks. Several family members then demanded, "Bring him back!" and others yelled that the audit was "bull****" and a "joke." Prado then returned and listened as victims' families denounced his report, the City Council and the responding officers.

Ruben Zamorra said, "My daughter was left for dead. These police officers signed up to do a job. They didn't do it."

Felisha Martinez, mother of victim Xavier Lopez, told CNN she followed Prado after he left the meeting to ask him "if he really felt what he had to say today was the right thing."

She went on:

How does he sleep at night knowing that this is what he had to say? He hurt all of us today ... There was cops already in there, and they didn't

do nothing. They froze. Us parents, families were willing to go into that school, willing to give their lives for them to get them out.

Prado's cover-up of the inaction of law enforcement on that day—when hundreds of officers on the scene did nothing for 77 minutes, while the gunman, Salvador Ramos, was allowed to shoot and kill 9- and 10-year-old children in their classrooms—has one purpose: to create a documentary basis for the legal defense of the police officers.

This fact is hardly a secret, given that the title on the first page of the report states, "Investigative Report, Privileged and Confidential Work Product—Prepared in Anticipation of Litigation and/or For Use in Trial."

The report accuses District Attorney Christina Mitchell—who is conducting a criminal inquiry into the law enforcement response to the mass shooting and empaneling a grand jury in the matter—of not cooperating with Prado's investigation. Former Uvalde Mayor Don McLaughlin previously accused Mitchell of a "cover-up" and hindering the investigation.

Besides his admission that there were "failures in the response of law enforcement," the conclusions of Prado's report contradict the findings of both a Texas and a US Justice Department investigation into the Uvalde massacre. Those reports found that the designation of the incident as a "barricaded gunman" instead of an "active shooter" scenario by leading law enforcement officers was behind the inaction that left Ramos unimpeded for over an hour.

Those reports essentially dismissed any responsibility on the part of state and federal law enforcement and blamed the disastrous response entirely on local police authorities. The Justice Department investigation, for example, found that Uvalde Acting Police Chief Mariano Pargas "continued to provide no direction, command or control to personnel" 48 minutes after the shooter entered the elementary school.

In Prado's report, Pargas is excused because Robb Elementary School was under the jurisdiction of the school district police department. Prado's report says, "It would be my recommendation, my team's recommendation, to exonerate Lt. Pargas."

The Republican governor of Texas, Greg Abbott, who has led a vicious attack on migrants entering the US

across the border with Mexico, has so far made no comment on the city's report. In the days immediately following the shooting, Abbott appeared in Uvalde and heaped praise on the local police officers and their response to the massacre, and was denounced by the families of the victims.

According to the K-12 School Shooting Database, there have been 65 shootings so far in 2024, with 58 fatalities. This is on pace with the 348 shootings and 249 deaths in all of 2023.

This number includes gang shootings, domestic violence, shootings at sports games and after hours school events, suicides, fights that escalate into shootings, and accidents.

Data going back to 1966 shows that the annual number of shootings remained below 66 for five decades, when it suddenly rocketed upward. It has increased by four to six times that threshold over the past seven years.



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