For the wounded children and teachers inside Rooms 111 and 112, help was a few feet away for more than an hour.

Videos show a clear path down the blue-and-green hallway to the classroom doors — no physical barriers to keep law enforcement from rushing in to stop a young man with an AR-15-style rifle. But that gun hobbled and paralyzed the nearly 400 officers who responded to Robb Elementary School in Uvalde on May 24.

The videos crystallized a lack of urgency, indecision, unclear command and control, communication problems and poor leadership. They have also revealed a history of neglect in Uvalde, symbolized by inoperable radios. The result was the worst police response to a mass shooting in U.S. history.

Nearly six months since the murder of 19 third and fourth graders and two teachers, the failures of authorities before, during and after the killings are — unbelievably — still coming into focus. Accountability is slower yet.

The Uvalde Consolidated Independent School District suspended its police operations and fired two officers, including Chief Pete Arredondo. Uvalde Police Department Lt. Mariano Pargas, the city’s acting chief on May 24 who knew children were alive in the classrooms, resigned before being fired for his inaction. The Texas Department of Public Safety dismissed Sgt. Juan Maldonado, who arrived within minutes of the shooting, suspended two others and is investigating several more. For many Uvalde families, this isn’t enough. We agree.

The lack of accountability, coupled with an official narrative that shifted blame from the DPS response, has been untenable.

DPS Director Steve McCraw quickly blamed Arredondo, but hundreds of law enforcement officers, including 91 from DPS, failed to intervene. Arredondo bears responsibility, but he is not alone.

DPS’ misinformation, blame-shifting and lack of transparency hid the truth, further harming the victims’ families and public understanding.

With each revelation about the failed response, the need for accountability grows. The buck should stop with McCraw, who should resign or be fired. But the story of the state’s neglect in Uvalde stretches back years, exemplified in the failure to provide a robust emergency radio system for the region.

In this editorial, we examine some of the ways the state failed Uvalde before, during and after the shooting, underscoring the need for wholesale change at the state’s top law enforcement agency.

**Failures before: Equipment**

Radios give authorities situational awareness and a way to coordinate responses.

For years, Uvalde’s regional radio system had seen more use than intended as the state grew its border security operations. Despite the wear and tear, the counties along this part of the border have said the state didn’t provide funding to maintain a system installed following the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

In May 2015, the Middle Rio Grande Development Council — a nine-county group that includes Uvalde — met with elected officials and police leaders to discuss the radio system’s funding.

Forrest Anderson, then the council’s 911 and homeland security director, wrote that McCraw
advised “he has no funds to support the system” even though DPS “troopers use the system.”

On Aug. 16, 2015, McCraw emailed that “senior leadership” in the governor’s office was “aware of the issue and understood the importance” of addressing the radios. They were working to find funding, he added.


In 2015, county leaders “asked for $5 million, and they got nothing,” he said. “In 2018, they went back and asked for $9 million, and they got a $1 million Band-Aid.”

Abbott’s office told us via email that between 2015 and the massacre, his Public Safety Office (separate from the DPS), “provided over $950,000 to Uvalde for their radios,” as well as “$2 million in additional funding” to the council for “regional radio infrastructure.” Those dollars funded “all radio requests recommended by the council.”

Uvalde Mayor Don McLaughlin disagreed. “If you get $2 million divided by nine counties, do the math,” he said. “That’s not going to cover what you need when you got radio towers that are failing.”

Anderson, who now works for Uvalde County Emergency Management, emailed that “DPS uses the regional system exclusively for Operation Lone Star ... with no offer of funding for the use, maintenance, etc.”

On May 24, the years of neglect caught up when radios faltered as hundreds of officers descended on Robb.

The Texas Senate hearing on the massacre, his Public Safety Office (separate from the DPS), “provided over $950,000 to Uvalde for their radios,” as well as “$2 million in additional funding” to the council for “regional radio infrastructure.” Those dollars funded “all radio requests recommended by the council.”

The Texas Senate hearing on the massacre, his Public Safety Office (separate from the DPS), “provided over $950,000 to Uvalde for their radios,” as well as “$2 million in additional funding” to the council for “regional radio infrastructure.” Those dollars funded “all radio requests recommended by the council.”

Uvalde Mayor Don McLaughlin disagreed. “If you get $2 million divided by nine counties, do the math,” he said. “That’s not going to cover what you need when you got radio towers that are failing.”

Anderson, who now works for Uvalde County Emergency Management, emailed that “DPS uses the regional system exclusively for Operation Lone Star ... with no offer of funding for the use, maintenance, etc.”

On May 24, the years of neglect caught up when radios faltered as hundreds of officers descended on Robb.

The Texas Senate hearing on the massacre noted interoperability problems among the different agencies’ radios, and the House interim report describes how the radios worked “intermittently” in the school’s hallways. Arredondo and Pargas didn’t bring their radios into the school. They used cellphones and other officers’ radios to communicate.

On Nov. 10, Abbott’s office announced $750,000 in state and $100,000 in federal funds are slated for the Middle Rio Grande counties. An additional $97,500 in federal money will go to Uvalde County, but these infusions are too little, too late.

In addition to communication problems, local authorities had “zero interagency training” with the hundreds of extra DPS troopers in the area for Operation Lone Star, Gutierrez said. DPS, “who is essentially a supplement to our county sheriff’s offices across the state of Texas should be doing inter agency training, just like the federal government does... and that never happened here.”

DPS did not respond to our request for comment.

Failure during: Inaction

It’s well-known that 376 officers from 23 agencies, including 91 DPS officers, rushed to Robb on May 24.

After the gunman entered Rooms 111 and 112 and fired more than 100 rounds over 2½ minutes, “two separate groups of officers converged on the building,” the House report says.

And then they waited: for leadership and direction, and for tactical units, breaching tools, shields, more firepower and keys for a door that likely wasn’t locked. They waited as children called 911 and pleaded for help. They waited as children suffered and died. They waited for the courage to open that classroom door. They waited for 73 minutes before a Border Patrol Tactical Unit, or BORTAC, team entered the classroom and killed the gunman.

The House report describes the “failure of any officers to assume and exercise incident command” as “a major error in the law enforcement response.”

We wonder if and how the spotty radio system added to this confusion.

Most of those interviewed thought Arredondo was in charge, while others “could not tell that anybody was in charge” of the scene, described as “chaos” and a “cluster.”

Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training, or ALERRT, says others could have assumed command. In our view, that falls squarely to DPS, the state’s top law enforcement agency.

McCraw told state senators, “I’m reluctant to encourage or even think of any situation where you’d want some level of hierarchy where a larger police department gets to come in and take over.”

Yet there are many examples of DPS assum-
ing control or playing a larger role in complicated situations, such as the 1991 Luby’s Cafeteria shooting in Killeen, the 2013 explosion in West and the 2018 school shooting in Santa Fe. In Uvalde, most DPS troopers stayed outside.

DPS Capt. Joel Betancourt, who made news in April for racking up more than $164,000 in Operation Lone Star overtime, allegedly ordered all troopers to stay on the perimeter outside the building, according to a DPS lieutenant’s statement. Another officer said he heard Betancourt radio the breach team to “stand down” moments before it entered the classroom.

DPS bodycam footage of troopers talking outside the school shows officers more concerned about themselves than children:

“What is the safest way to do this? I’m not trying to get clapped out.”

“And I also don’t like standing right by the windows where we can get shot, bro.”

“You’re going to put yourself in danger?”

At least four of those who died still had heartbeats after BORTAC killed the gunman. Dr. Mark Escott, DPS medical director, is determining if any of the victims could have survived had police acted sooner.

While we await the answer to such an infuriating question, we have little doubt McCraw’s focus on Arredondo’s failings shifted early attention from DPS’ failings.

### Failures after: Misinformation

The public misinformation began shortly after the gunman was killed.

Before the infamous May 25 press conference during which Abbott said “it could have been worse,” DPS Regional Director for South Texas Victor Escalon briefed officials with secondhand knowledge. Having arrived at Robb late in the incident, Escalon was the wrong person to brief Abbott. But he stepped in for a Uvalde Police Department officer who passed out moments before the briefing.

Escalon “repeated a false narrative that the entire incident lasted as little as forty minutes thanks to officers who rapidly devised a plan, stacked up and neutralized the attacker,” according to the House report.

Then Abbott and McCraw falsely claimed that a school district police officer engaged the gunman outside the school.

The ALERRT report, released July 6, perpetuated another myth that a Uvalde police officer “observed the suspect carrying a rifle outside the west hall entry” of the school. The report said the officer had an opportunity to shoot but didn’t get permission from his supervisor in time.

This was false.

“Had that police officer taken that shot, there would’ve been a dead P.E. teacher … the DPS knew that,” McLaughlin said.

McCraw also claimed a teacher left the school’s exterior door propped open with a rock, but surveillance video showed the teacher kicking the rock away.

McCraw also criticized Arredondo’s decision to treat the incident as a barricaded suspect instead of an active shooter — again, ignoring his own agency’s failed response.

And DPS continues to fight public information requests. McLaughlin said DPS, the Texas Rangers and the Uvalde district attorney have not met with city officials for updates since the day after the shooting.

“I felt that DPS was not being truthful and trying to cover up themselves for what happened that day,” he said. “And I still feel that way, strongly.”

### In the aftermath

DPS has fired Sgt. Juan Maldonado and suspended at least two DPS officers, including Ranger Christopher Kindell.

Former trooper Crimson Hux Elizondo was under investigation and resigned. The Uvalde school district’s police department hired, and quickly fired, her, citing bodycam footage from May 24 in which she said, “If my son had been in there, I would not have been outside. I promise you that.”

They’re among seven troopers, including Betancourt, under DPS inspector general investigation.

In mid-September McCraw said his agency has “some level of culpability.” He said he wished troopers had assumed control and he would resign if his officers had “any culpability.”

At an October Public Safety Commission meeting, Uvalde families reminded McCraw of this, but he equivocated.
“If DPS as an institution failed ... then absolutely, I need to go,” McCraw said. “I can tell you this right now: DPS as an institution ... did not fail the community.”

What’s worse, the statement or the expectation that Uvalde families should live with this?

With 19 children and two teachers murdered, how can six months have passed with such little accountability?
In Uvalde, DPS puts self first

Now, double-down on the indefensible, agency still failing those it’s charged with protecting

Thanks to officers who “sincerely desired” their jobs at the Texas School Safety Center to keep Uvalde safe, according to the state’s report. Then Abbott and McKinney falsely claimed that state school districts forgot to rope off one of the buildings. Now, the public is left wondering if DPS was a null entity. Officers, like DPS Director Steve McCraw, simply stepped back as a shooter killed them in Uvalde on May 24.

In Uvalde, DPS puts self first: to mislead, to misinform. Again and again and again.

For six months since the Uvalde shooting, the DPS has failed toandise, cover up, and mislead. The public is waiting for answers.

From the school system to the federal government to DPS and the Texas Governor’s Office, information about the Uvalde shooting has been mislabeled and twisted. The public is waiting for the truth.

While the state continues to dodge questions, DPS continues to ignore its own failures. It’s time for DPS to confess and for DPS to move forward.

In the aftermath

DPS has fired Chief James Bedford and Captain Christopher Kindell. But, it’s too late. DPS has failed us. DPS has failed the families of the Uvalde shooting.

The public is waiting for the truth.

While we await the answers, the public is waiting for the truth. The public is waiting for DPS to confess and to move forward.

The public is waiting for DPS and DPS to say, “We’ve learned our lesson.”