

Laura Prather in Vanity Fair: ‘Media Outlets Lawyer Up to get Uvalde Shooting Records’

July 21, 2022 Laura Prather

PRACTICES Media Entertainment and Sports, Intellectual Property, Litigation, Intellectual Property Litigation, Media and Entertainment Litigation

[Laura Prather](#), partner and head of Haynes Boone’s Media Law Practice Group, was interviewed by *WGN Radio* and *Vanity Fair* about the firm’s representation of a coalition of local, state and national media outlets that is trying to obtain public records that would provide a clearer picture of law enforcement’s handling of the Uvalde shooting. Below are excerpts:

WGN Radio:

Many media outlets have come together in coalition to obtain the Uvalde shooting records, something the Texas government is making difficult to achieve. In her interview with *WGN Radio*, Laura says “All of these organizations have submitted public information requests of the local officials in Uvalde, the state officials, the governor, to try to get answers as to what happened that day, and they’ve all been met with similar roadblocks.”

The records are public documents, but Texas government is claiming an exemption due to ongoing investigations. Laura says “[The mayor of Uvalde] had the ability under the law to be able to disclose the information. He was choosing not to.”

Listen to Laura’s full interview with *WGN Radio* [here](#).

Vanity Fair:

Brian Chasnoff, an investigative reporter at the *San Antonio Express-News*, says his paper has filed more than a dozen record requests since a shooter killed 19 children and two teachers in Uvalde, Texas, eight weeks ago. “It sounds, you know, simple,” he tells me. But “very few of them have been fulfilled—virtually none of them.” *The Texas Tribune* and *ProPublica* have had a similar experience. So has *The New York Times*. And the *Austin American-Statesman*. And the *Associated Press*. And *Texas Public Radio*. In their shared frustration last month, these organizations and more than three dozen others, both local and national, joined a media coalition. “Since we were all pursuing appeals of our denials and had gotten lawyers involved, and we’re probably gonna go to court, it made sense for us to work together on that,” Times deputy National editor Kim Murphy told me. “We all kind of wanted the same thing, and all had kind of the same reasons for asking for it.”

“The whole preamble of the [Texas] Public Information Act talks about the fact that these are the public’s documents,” said Laura Prather, the First Amendment lawyer behind the coalition. “The supposition’s been turned on its head. And as a result of it being turned on its head, the media, as a conduit for the public, has coalesced to try to right this wrong.” ... The coalition’s goal, said Prather, is to “get as many answers as we possibly can for this community—this community that is suffering tremendously.”

Texas is unique in how it handles public information requests, according to Prather: A governmental entity can either provide records or claim an exemption and seek a ruling from the attorney general.

In the case of Uvalde, multiple public agencies sought exemptions for a variety of reasons, which included that it could interfere with pending investigations. Prather anticipates more legal briefs, and further actions taken, outside of the letters she has sent to the mayor and attorney general on the coalition's behalf.

It's not the first time that the media has come together in the aftermath of a mass shooting to try to work through the logjam of what would typically be public information. Coalitions were formed after the shootings in Parkland, Las Vegas, and Orlando. Prather said the coalitions in Parkland and Vegas ended up having to go to court, where they ultimately uncovered the records they were seeking. Prather doesn't know yet if the Uvalde media coalition is headed in that direction. The next administrative deadlines, for the attorney general to rule on the requests for the exemptions, are in August, but Prather is hopeful there will be more voluntary disclosure before then.

To read the full article from *Vanity Fair*, click [here](#).