Haynes Boone Victory in Uvalde Records Lawsuit Receives Widespread Coverage

July 3, 2023

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Haynes Boone scored a significant court victory Jun 29, 2023 on behalf of a coalition of news organizations seeking the release of records related to the horrific 2022 school shooting at Robb Elementary in Uvalde, Texas that killed 19 students and two teachers.

The media coalition filed suit in 2022 after their open-records requests were denied by state and local agencies, which refused to release information that could shed light on the law enforcement response to the shooting.

Haynes Boone Partner and Media Law Practice Group Chair Laura Prather is the lead lawyer for the media coalition. She is assisted by Associate Reid Pillifant.

On June 29, Austin state court judge Daniella De Seta Lyttle sided with the media coalition, granting its motion for summary judgment and ordering the Texas Department of Public Safety to begin the process of releasing public records related to the shooting.

The ruling has received widespread media coverage, including in CNN, *ProPublica, The Texas Tribune, Austin America-Statesman, Texas Lawyer*, Yahoo! News, KXXV (25 ABC) and KENS 5 San Antonio.

Below are excerpts of the coverage:

CNN

The suit was brought by more than a dozen major news outlets seeking transparency and insight into the botched response of law enforcement who arrived at the scene and waited for more than an hour before confronting and killing the gunman, who had holed up inside a pair of connected classrooms with the victims. …

“The Texas Department of Public Safety has offered inconsistent accounts of how law enforcement responded to the Uvalde tragedy, and its lack of transparency has stirred suspicion and frustration in a community that is still struggling with grief and shock,” Laura Lee Prather, a First Amendment lawyer who represents the plaintiffs, said when the suit was filed.

Austin America-Statesman

In addition to the American-Statesman’s parent company, Gannett, the other media outlets listed as plaintiffs in the lawsuit include the *Texas Tribune,* the New York Times Company, the *Washington Post*, NBC News, ABC News, CBS News, and CNN.

Laura Prather, the lead attorney representing the news organizations in the lawsuit, issued a statement in response to the ruling Thursday.

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"This is a huge victory for the community of Uvalde and for transparency in the state of Texas. It's long past time for the Texas Department of Public Safety to release the records detailing what happened the day of the horrific school shooting in May 2022," Prather said in a statement. "Disclosing all of the requested law enforcement information - not just bits and pieces of it - will help the people of Uvalde, the news media and the public at large hold public officials accountable in hopes of preventing a similar tragedy in the future."

Texas Lawyer

"The court order means those documents DPS is withholding to which a mandatory exemption does not apply, they can go ahead and produce now," Prather said.

The records concern the police response, during which officers waited more than an hour to confront the shooter, who killed 19 children and two teachers.

ProPublica

The decision by 261st Civil District Court Judge Daniella DeSeta Lyttle marks a win for a coalition of news organizations, including *ProPublica* and *The Texas Tribune*, which sued the agency in August. The lawsuit sought the release of records that would bring more clarity to law enforcement's failed response, including emails, video footage, call logs, emergency communications and forensic records.

"The public deserves a full accounting of what happened that day, and we're glad that the judge has begun that process," said Reid Pillifant, an associate attorney with Haynes Boone, a law firm that represents the news organizations. "We're hopeful DPS won't fight this decision, and we'll begin the process of providing transparency."

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