



GOVERNOR GREG ABBOTT

June 7, 2022

Colonel Steven C. McCraw
Director
Texas Department of Public Safety
P.O. Box 4087
Austin, Texas 78773-4087

The Honorable Mike H. Morath
Commissioner
Texas Education Agency
1701 North Congress Avenue
Austin, Texas 78701-1494

The Honorable Harrison Keller, Ph.D.
Commissioner
Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board
P.O. Box 12788
Austin, Texas 78711-2788

Dear Colonel McCraw, Commissioner Morath and Commissioner Keller:

As we have seen from the tragic events in Uvalde, acts of mass violence are often preceded by other violent acts, threats, or related behaviors. The U.S. Secret Service's *Mass Attacks in Public Spaces 2019* report shows that of the 34 targeted attacks, including schools, which occurred in the United States in 2019, "most of the attackers had exhibited behavior that elicited concern in family members, friends, neighbors, classmates, co-workers, and others, and in many cases, those individuals feared for the safety of themselves or others."

One recommendation provided by the Secret Service to stem the tide of school violence is for individuals who witness this kind of alarming behavior to report it to the appropriate authorities so that interventions may occur before a mass attack is carried out. These interventions can be led by teachers, staff, behavioral health professionals, or, in extreme cases, law enforcement.

The State of Texas began to implement this recommendation after the tragic attack in El Paso on September 5, 2019, when I issued Executive Order GA-07, relating to the prevention of mass attacks. That order required the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS), the Texas Education Agency (TEA), and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) to work together on establishing "ways to better inform schools, students, staff, and families about the importance of Suspicious Activity Reports and how to initiate that process." GA-07 also ordered DPS "to increase

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staff at all fusion centers in Texas for the purpose of better collecting and responding to Suspicious Activity Reports.”

Following GA-07, DPS added 12 new analyst positions to support fusion center initiatives and assigned additional personnel to the Texas Fusion Center. These efforts have been recognized by the National Fusion Center Association for stopping acts of mass violence, including at least one school shooting. Several Texas school districts also began working with their local fusion center and adopted a suspicious activity reporting tool where concerning behavior could be reported, vetted, and addressed.

Additionally, DPS amended the iWatch reporting platforms, including the mobile app, to offer a school safety reporting option. The use of this single, statewide reporting system better ensures that tips from different parts of the community are better reported back to the schools to allow for the appropriate interventions and enhance school safety.

We must accelerate these efforts to build a network of schools that are well-versed in suspicious activity reporting. That requires redoubling our efforts on the important work outlined in GA-07 and providing a robust rollout of the iWatch program that reaches communities and school districts across the state.

To achieve that goal, I am directing DPS, TEA, and THECB to enhance and expedite your efforts to make widely known and easily accessible the ability to report suspicious activity known to students, staff, and families into iWatch. Efforts should include working with the state’s eight fusion centers and with all school districts to teach students, staff, and families about Texas’s suspicious activity reporting program, known as iWatchTexas.

Reporting concerning behavior is a key component of intervention strategies to keep schools safe, and it is only through our joint efforts that we will succeed.

An easy way that Texans can report suspicious activity is through iwatchtx.org/index.html. A mobile app, iWatchTexas, is also available. Finally, individuals can make a report by calling 844-643-2251. Reporting through any of these channels can be anonymous.

Thank you for your service.

Sincerely,



Greg Abbott
Governor

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