

From: McCraw, Steven
Sent: Friday, May 08, 2015 5:20 PM
To: GRP_DPS Everyone
Subject: DPS Response

Fellow Employees,

Some news organizations recently published stories about the Department that included inaccurate information, and information taken out of context, completely omitted, or significantly mischaracterized. Our media and communications team worked ahead of time to educate the reporters who were writing these stories by providing a significant amount of information about the issues they were questioning. Unfortunately, the resulting articles did not reflect all of the facts that they were provided, and consequently, the articles grossly misrepresented these issues to their readers.

The Public Safety Commission and your leadership team are incredibly proud of the outstanding work all of you do for this department and our state, and we take great issue with this type of inaccurate reporting about the Department.

As such, we provided the Texas Legislature and Texas Leadership with the same information we sent these reporters. The Department has an obligation to make sure our state leaders have accurate information about the issues impacting DPS and our state.

Yesterday, the Austin American-Statesman posted a blog, highlighting our efforts to provide our state leaders with the facts related to these recent news stories.

We wanted to take this opportunity to share that blog post with you. (please see the blog post at the bottom of this email)

Most reporters possess great professional integrity, and we appreciate their commitment to reporting factual information to the public. That said, we will continue to provide the Legislature and State Leadership accurate information when the facts have been misrepresented to the public.

Thank you for all you do. We couldn't be more proud of your dedication to DPS and the people of Texas.

DPS goes to Legislature to protest media coverage

Austin American-Statesman
Jeremy Schwartz
Eric Dexheimer

May 7, 2015

Last Friday night, less than three hours after responding to a series of American-Statesman questions for an upcoming article on the agency's efforts in the latest border surge, the Texas Department of Public Safety sent a blistering letter to lawmakers and their aides, pre-complaining about what DPS officials expected would be an unfair story on the agency's modest role in seizing drugs as part of Operation Strong Safety.

The Statesman is not the only Texas newspaper recently to be the subject of a DPS mass email to the Legislature about its coverage of the agency. Between April 13 and May 1, DPS denounced four articles: two from the Statesman, one from the El Paso Times and a fourth by the Dallas Morning News.

It's an unusually aggressive response to media scrutiny from a state agency, according to several legislative aides consulted by the Statesman, who said they weren't aware of similar strategies by other departments. It also is another example of DPS director Steven McCraw's sensitivity to what he views as less-than-flattering portrayals of the agency. That attitude was [displayed again](#) Wednesday, when internal emails showed that McCraw had personally demanded that an off-duty trooper working the SXSW music festival be punished for posing for a picture with rapper Snoop Dogg, who McCraw characterized as "a dope smoking cop hater."

On April 13, [DPS sent a letter to state lawmakers](#) complaining about two newspaper stories: a [Statesman article on border surveillance of Mexico](#) that a contractor described as "spying" in internal documents, and an [El Paso Times article](#) on lawmakers questioning Director Steve McCraw's testimony regarding a series of border security contracts with Abrams Learning and Information Systems.

"The department provided specific information to those news outlets; however, unfortunately the resulting articles did not adequately represent all of the facts or the department's complete response," DPS deputy director of Homeland Security Robert Bodisch wrote, including the agency's full responses to the newspapers. While Bodisch took issue with the Statesman's characterization of the surveillance, his response to the El Paso Times was more aggressive:

"Respectfully, your questions read more like an opinion piece than a news story, with unsubstantiated innuendo, that in essence rehashes inaccurate information about a contract that expired more than four years ago. Also, the manner in which you are questioning the director's integrity is rash and without merit."

The agency's offensive intensified 10 days later, when it [sent a warning to legislators in advance](#) of a [Dallas Morning News article](#). On April 24, Bodisch attacked an as-yet unpublished investigative story about TrapWire, a "suspicious activity reporting system" that has raised questions over surveillance of Texans.

"We wanted to make sure you were aware of this upcoming column," he wrote, "as the promo for its publication is already riddled with inaccurate and exaggerated insinuations, and the column has the potential to significantly misrepresent the facts about this program despite the information provided to the DMN."

A week later, [DPS sent its second pre-publication letter](#), about the Statesman's upcoming reporting. The newspaper was finishing up [a story revealing the agency had contributed less than 10 percent](#) to stated Operation Strong Safety-related drug seizure totals, information that El Paso Democrat Rep. Cesar Blanco had sought since March, but which DPS had refused to provide. The Statesman had also asked DPS for clarity on trends within DPS traffic stop data. In his letter, Bodisch predicted that the impending story "has the potential to draw inaccurate and grossly misleading conclusions taken out of context and derived from inaccurate assumptions and a lack of knowledge."

He also raised questions about the reporters' motives: "Based on several recent stories published by the Statesman, it seems there is a common disdain for the Texas Department of Public Safety among some of the reporters. The motivating reasons for this disdain is not clear; but what is clear, is that the credibility and reputation of the brave men and women of DPS who willingly risk their lives to protect Texans every day is being jeopardized by these biased articles."