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Texas Lawmakers Confront Emergency Shortfalls After Deadly Kerr County Floods

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Texas legislators convened in Kerrville this week to address the aftermath of the catastrophic July 4 flash floods that devastated Kerr County, leaving at least 136 people dead, including 27 young campers and staff at an all-girls camp. Local officials revealed that the region lacked a modern flood warning system, contributing to the scale of the tragedy.

The legislative hearing marked the first official visit by a panel of lawmakers to the affected area in the Texas Hill Country. Community members, many wearing green ribbons to honor the victims, gathered as officials testified about the need for urgent improvements in communication infrastructure and flood preparedness.

Kerr County Judge Rob Kelly stated that residents received little to no notice of the impending disaster. “What we experienced on July 4 was sudden, violent and overwhelming,” he said, noting that limited broadband access and poor mobile phone service hindered emergency alerts.

William “Dub” Thomas, the county’s emergency management coordinator, addressed questions about his absence during the early stages of the flood. He explained that he had been ill the previous day and missed two scheduled briefings with the Texas Division of Emergency Management (TDEM). He clarified that written summaries from those calls had been shared with other local leaders to maintain continuity of information. Thomas said he was first alerted to the situation around 5:30 a.m. on July 4 and arrived at the sheriff’s office shortly after. “There was no visible flooding on my drive into the office, but it quickly became clear that the situation was escalating,” he told lawmakers.

As the inquiry unfolded, officials began releasing limited emergency records, including 911 transcripts that documented the urgency of the unfolding crisis. Calls from residents described rising water levels, trapped children, and families attempting to flee rapidly flooding homes. In one call from neighboring Kendall County, a woman pleaded for help for relatives stranded at a church camp, warning of dangerous crossings and dozens of children in danger.

Despite public interest, Kerr County officials have denied multiple records requests submitted under the Texas Public Information Act for 911 recordings and body-camera footage related to the flood response.

In response to the disaster, Republican Governor Greg Abbott added flood relief and disaster preparedness to the agenda of the ongoing 30-day special legislative session. Lawmakers have since introduced proposals aimed at improving early warning systems, upgrading emergency communications, and reinforcing flood-control infrastructure in vulnerable regions.

Kerr County, located along the Guadalupe River, remains without a formal warning system. Officials said the county had missed several opportunities over the years to secure state or local funding for such a system, a shortfall now under renewed scrutiny.

As recovery efforts continue, community members and lawmakers alike have called for prompt legislative action to ensure such a tragedy does not repeat itself.