Texas Behavioral Threat Assessment, Intervention, and Prevention Program Strategy

Texas Department of Public Safety

Criminal Investigations Division

September 2024

FORWARD

Mass casualty attacks have devastating consequences, and it is imperative that potential subjects be identified and prevented from acting upon their plans. The tragic attack on Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas, on May 24, 2022, serves as a constant reminder that such incidents can occur unexpectedly in any community.   In recent years, several planned attacks have been thwarted as a result of the timely reporting and investigation of threats and suspicious behaviors. However, as threats become increasingly prevalent, there is an urgent need for a more comprehensive system of preventive measures that extends beyond traditional law enforcement approaches.

In response to the rising number of threats across Texas, local, state, and federal stakeholders from various disciplines have collaborated to develop the Texas Behavioral Threat Assessment, Intervention, and Prevention Program. This initiative aims to prevent targeted violence through a prevention-focused framework. The Texas Department of Public Safety is committed to facilitating the implementation of this strategy by ensuring close coordination among law enforcement, mental health professionals, social workers, school staff and administration, prosecutors, and others. Some jurisdictions in the state have already adopted many of these best practices, and this initiative seeks to expand upon their successes by instituting it throughout the state.

Steven C. McCraw
Colonel/Director
Texas Department of Public Safety

Contents

Executive Summary

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) defines targeted violence as "any premeditated act of violence directed at a specific individual, group, or location, regardless of motivation, that violates the criminal laws of the United States or of any State or subdivision of the United States." The Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) defines mass casualty attacks as incidents involving three or more fatalities, excluding the perpetrator. The United States Secret Service uses the term mass attacks in public places to describe incidents where three or more individuals are harmed (killed or injured) in public locations.

Despite differing terminologies, these definitions all focus on premeditated acts of violence against groups or in public places, often with the intent to cause significant harm. Texas has faced numerous such incidents in recent years, including mass shootings and targeted violence, necessitating a comprehensive and coordinated approach to threat assessment and prevention.

This strategy outlines the principles, goals, objectives, and structure of the Texas Behavioral Threat Assessment, Intervention, and Prevention Program. The program is designed to enhance the state's ability to detect, deter, and manage potential threats of targeted violence through multidisciplinary collaboration.

Introduction

The Texas Behavioral Threat Assessment, Intervention, and Prevention Program is a statewide initiative aimed at preventing incidents of targeted violence. The program operates through regional threat assessment teams, composed of stakeholders from law enforcement, mental health, social services, and other relevant fields, who work together to assess and manage potential threats.

The FBI's document *Making Prevention a Reality* summarizes the threat assessment process as follows: *"Threat assessment is a systematic, fact-based method of investigation and examination that blends the collection and analysis of multiple sources of information with published research and practitioner experience, focusing on an individual's patterns of thinking and behavior to determine whether, and to what extent, a person of concern is moving toward an attack. A threat assessment is not a final product, but the beginning of the management process."*

The threat management process involves development of a management plan for monitoring and intervention based on input from all relevant stakeholders; implementation of that plan, and continued assessment of potential threats for as long as needed, to include coordination and handoff when a potential threat actor relocates to another jurisdiction.

In all cases, the goal of Texas' program is *prevention* rather than *prediction* of targeted violence incidents—identifying subjects who may pose a threat to the people of Texas and implementing appropriate intervention activities to minimize the risk that these subjects carry out attacks.

Threat

Texas faces a persistent threat from targeted violence, including domestic and international terrorism. Historical data indicates that although the nature of these threats may evolve, the overall risk remains. Recent incidents across Texas (see Appendix A) demonstrate the need for enhanced tools and capabilities to prevent such attacks.

Recent targeted violence attacks have been driven by a variety of motives, including family disputes, racial and religious hatred, workplace grievances, and mental health issues. Subjects often follow common paths towards violence and could potentially be detected and deterred before launching their attacks. Public awareness of targeted violence attacks has increasingly focused on the symptoms, indicators, and behavioral assessments of subjects that were missed or not reported prior to the occurrence of the incident. Many times, the indicators, symptoms, and behaviors associated with targeted violence attacks were present and known by family members, peers, and community members, but unfortunately were not relayed to law enforcement and partner agencies. Thus, the symptoms and indicators of targeted violence are often not known by law enforcement until the criminal investigation into the attack has been conducted.

As Texans continue to experience targeted violence and Texas law enforcement works to respond, multi-agency, multi-jurisdictional partnerships are the most effective methods of ensuring pre-attack indicators are detected and reported, enabling proactive interventions prior to the commission of a criminal or terroristic act.

Vision

Texas aims to reduce the risk of targeted violence incidents through a coordinated, statewide effort that enhances public awareness, threat assessment, and intervention capabilities while respecting privacy and civil liberties.

Mission

The mission of the Texas Behavioral Threat Assessment, Intervention, and Prevention Program is to prevent targeted violence through a coordinated approach that involves receiving and assessing threat information, recommending intervention measures, and monitoring potential threats over time.

Key Principles

- **Multi-agency, Multi-jurisdictional Approach:** Integrating perspectives from various fields is crucial for effective threat assessment.

- **Early Intervention:** The sooner a potential threat is identified, the better the chances of successful intervention.

- **Information Sharing:** Encouraging and facilitating information sharing is key to preventing targeted violence.

- **Coordination and Deconfliction:** Avoiding duplication of efforts and ensuring all stakeholders work together effectively.

- **Follow-up:** Continuous assessment and management of threats are essential until the threat is neutralized.

- **Flexibility:** The program must be adaptable to the unique needs of each region and case.

- **Protection of Privacy and Civil Liberties:** Adherence to legal standards is paramount.

- **Continuous Improvement:** Ongoing training and process refinement are necessary for program success.
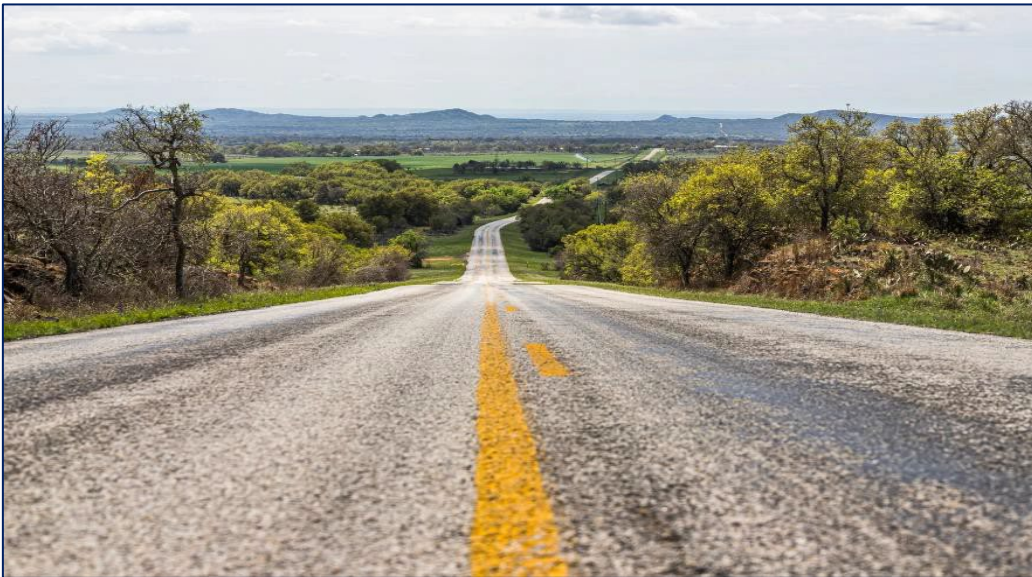
Goals and Objectives

The Texas Behavioral Threat Assessment, Intervention, and Prevention Program will achieve the following goals and objectives:

Goal 1: Build a coordinated stakeholder network to prevent targeted violence in Texas communities

Objective 1.1: Secure participation of key stakeholders

Objective 1.2: Ensure strong collaboration and communication among partners

Milestone 1: Stakeholder Network

Planned Actions:

- Establish local behavioral threat assessment teams with multidisciplinary backgrounds to support prevention efforts, aligning with the objective of expanding multi-agency collaboration at the regional level.

- Train DPS-CID staff to deliver Threat Evaluation Reporting Courses (TERC), which are instrumental in equipping various stakeholders with the necessary skills to recognize and respond to indicators of potential radicalization. This training will enhance the network of agencies and organizations.

Completed Actions:

- DPS assigned threat-to-life lieutenants in each region to lead efforts in training local stakeholders and aid in establishing and assisting local behavioral BETA teams across Texas.

- A select number of DPS CID employees have become master certified trainers through the National Threat and Evaluation Reporting (NTER) Program, enabling them to train local stakeholders effectively.

- DPS CID employees are participating in statewide multidisciplinary community BETA teams across Texas, fostering collaboration and proactive threat management.

Goal 2: Build capacity among stakeholders

Objective 2.1: Provide relevant training and knowledge

Objective 2.2: Establish unified systems and processes that will facilitate monitoring, evaluation, and information sharing

Milestone 2: Capacity Building

Planned Actions:

- DPS will continue to deliver training to local stakeholders and to educate various audiences on the Texas BETA Intervention and Prevention Program goals and participation methods.

- Implement a standardized process for monitoring and evaluation that ensures all regions have consistent capacity-building measures.

Completed Actions:

- DPS CID has certified trainers through the DPS CID Train-the-Trainer BETA program who can train local stakeholders across all 7 regions of Texas, ensuring expert trainers are available to sustain and expand BETA team operations.

- DPS has provided training to stakeholders in all 7 regions, facilitating consistent capacity building across the state and ensuring broad-based knowledge dissemination.

Goal 3: Ensure effective operation of behavioral threat assessment (BETA) teams

Objective 3.1: Provide the guidance and support for BETA team operations

Objective 3.2: Equip BETA teams to collaborate successfully

Milestone 3: Operationalize Work

Planned Actions:

- Develop interagency guidelines for starting and operationalizing BETA teams throughout communities. This initiative will standardize processes across Texas, reducing service gaps and ensuring unified operations.

- Create a standardized communication process between teams to facilitate better collaboration and reduce response times.

Completed Actions:

- Developed Confidentiality and Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA): Developed a standardized NDA to ensure that all members of BETA teams understand and commit to maintaining the confidentiality of sensitive information. This is essential for protecting the privacy of individuals involved and ensuring that information is not disclosed inappropriately, which is crucial for the integrity and trustworthiness of the BETA program.

- Utilizes Authorization to Disclose Protected Health Information: Created a procedure for obtaining proper authorization to share public health information within the BETA teams. This document ensures that all health-related information is handled in compliance with

  legal standards, particularly those related to privacy, thereby protecting individuals' rights and reducing the risk of legal liabilities.

- Revamped Threat Triage and Data Collection Forms: Established standardized forms for threat triage and data collection, enabling consistent and systematic assessment of threats across all BETA teams. These forms are critical for ensuring that all threats are evaluated using the same criteria, leading to more accurate and coordinated responses.

- Developed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU): Developed MOUs to formalize partnerships and clarify the roles and responsibilities of each participating agency. These agreements are vital for establishing clear lines of communication and accountability, ensuring that all parties are aligned in their goals and methods, which strengthens the overall effectiveness of the BETA teams.

Goal 4: Sustain the program through professional development and governance

Objective 4.1: Support ongoing training and professional development

Objective 4.2: Keep leaders and the public informed

Objective 4.3: Establish effective governance for program evaluation and governance

Milestone 4: Sustaining Program

Planned Actions:

- Increase training sessions across the state and continue establishing BETA teams to ensure all areas have access to threat assessment and intervention resources.

- Continue to train stakeholders and leaders, ensuring that they communicate a unified message and have up-to-date information on current trends and best practices.

Completed Actions:

- Continued to introduce the statewide reporting tool, iWatch Texas, to facilitate public reporting and enhance the effectiveness of the BETA program.

- Conducted a comprehensive training program for stakeholders across all regions, ensuring the sustainability of BETA teams and their alignment with state and federal guidelines.

Goal 5: Conduct outreach to enhance behavioral threat assessment, intervention, and prevention activities

Objective 5.1: Promote the Texas Behavioral Threat Assessment, Intervention, and Prevention Program among partners in Texas

Objective 5.2: Expand the number of partners participating in the program

Objective 5.3: Increase the number of targeted violence-related suspicious activity reports (SARs) received through the iWatchTX reporting system

Milestone 5: Increasing Community Engagement

Planned Actions:

- Conduct outreach and training events across Texas to promote the Texas Behavioral Threat Assessment, Intervention, and Prevention Program

- Conduct annual conferences and workshops to improve and expand the Texas Behavioral Threat Assessment, Intervention, and Prevention Program

- Promote the iWatchTX suspicious activity community reporting system to increase the number of targeted violence-related SARs received by Texas fusion centers

Completed Actions:

- Initiated targeted violence and terrorism prevention (TVTP) community outreach program in Texas

- Initiated behavioral threat assessment and intervention training with partners across the state

- Scheduled initial Texas Behavioral Threat Assessment, Intervention, and Prevention Program conference for 2025

Figure 1. QR code for the iWatchTX community reporting system

Organization and Coordination

This section details the formation and operation of Behavioral Threat Assessment (BETA) Teams. These multi-agency teams are responsible for assessing potential threats, developing management plans, and monitoring their implementation.

BETA Teams include representatives from various sectors, including law enforcement, mental health services, and social workers. Each team is coordinated by the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) Criminal Investigations Division (CID)and operates under a unified framework to ensure consistency across regions.

BETA Team Functions

BETA Teams are multi-agency, multi-jurisdictional groups established at the regional level throughout Texas, responsible for leading and coordinating efforts to assess potential threats of targeted violence, developing threat management plans, and monitoring implementation of those plans until a subject is no longer deemed to be a threat. Teams will gather all available information related to persons of concern or threats of violence; determine, via threat assessment, whether persons of concern pose safety threats; and develop reasoned and thoughtful management recommendations designed to reduce targeted violence concerns and promote safety for all, including the persons of concern.

BETA Team Formation

Formation of BETA Teams will be coordinated by Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) Criminal Investigation Division (CID) Threat to Life Lieutenants assigned in each DPS region. At least one BETA team will be established in each of the seven DPS regions; additional teams within regions may be established based on the volume of work anticipated, geographic challenges, or other factors.

BETA Teams will include DPS regional threat to life personnel, who will be certified in behavioral threat management. In addition to DPS personnel, BETA Teams should include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Municipal, county, state, and federal law enforcement partners, such as the FBI, Department of Homeland Security, and US Secret Service

- Municipal, county, and volunteer fire department personnel

- Prosecution officers (County Attorneys, District Attorneys, and Assistant US Attorneys)

- Probation and parole officers (state and federal)

- Mental health officers

- US Department of Veteran Affairs personnel

- Social workers

- Clinical psychologists or other mental health professionals

- Local mental health authorities

- Texas Department of Family Protection Services personnel

- Intelligence support personnel

- School district administration (public, private, or chartered), college and university,

and school police department personnel

- Private sector companies, as appropriate

As a first step to forming BETA Teams, DPS Threat to Life Lieutenants should lead an effort to identify all threat assessment efforts currently active in the region. These may include existing threat assessment and management teams and school district threat assessment teams required by Senate Bill 11, 86th Texas Legislative Session; fusion centers or other law enforcement threat assessment groups; or other efforts. Depending on capabilities and structures already in place, regional BETA Teams may be formed around current teams or may be newly formed teams. The intent is to support, build upon, and coordinate current threat assessment and management efforts rather than to duplicate or replace them.

As teams are formed, memoranda of understanding (MOUs) outlining general operating procedures and responsibilities of team members should be signed by all participants. In addition, teams should select a BETA Team-Lead, who will lead meetings and other activities. CID Threat to Life Lieutenants will be available to serve as BETA Team-Lead, as needed.

BETA Reporting

Effective management of concerning behaviors before they escalate into violence relies heavily on robust and accessible reporting mechanisms. In Texas, the existing frameworks for handling crime and terrorism-related information have been foundational in maintaining public safety. The BETA program introduces an advanced workflow specifically designed to identify and manage concerning behaviors that could precede violent incidents. Central to this process is the timely and accurate reporting of such behaviors, which enables trained professionals to assess threats, allocate necessary resources, and implement de-escalation strategies promptly. The efficacy of this threat assessment process is contingent upon a collaborative approach where every individual has a critical role in the reporting cycle.

Figure 2. iWatch Texas Community Reporting System

The Texas Department of Public Safety's iWatch community reporting tool plays a crucial role in this collaborative effort by providing a multi-lingual platform for individuals to report concerning behaviors. This tool empowers community members, or "upstanders," to actively participate in the safety and security of their environments. By enabling easy and accessible reporting in multiple languages, iWatch ensures that all voices can contribute to identifying potential threats. Through this collective vigilance and prompt reporting, we can work together to preemptively address issues and foster a safer community.

BETA Team Meetings

All BETA Teams should meet in their regions at least once every month, with additional meetings held as needed based on the volume of work in the area. While in-person meetings are preferred, virtual meetings may be used as needed. BETA Team-Leads will ensure that all Team members are notified of the date, time, and location of each scheduled meeting.

Each BETA Team should establish a process for acting on time-sensitive information if a full team meeting is not possible. While the engagement of as many team members as possible is recommended, a core set of BETA Team members should be established to convene when protection of privacy and sensitive information is of the utmost concern. BETA Teams should discuss and assign the conducting of assessment and classification of potential target violence threat actors to BETA Team members based upon team members agencies' discipline. In addition, BETA Teams should develop processes to assign responsibility for reassessments of subjects when frequent reassessments are required outside the regular meeting schedule.

During meetings, the BETA Team will review relevant information, assess each individual's risk level based on available information and develop a recommended course of action to address the individual's perceived risk. Meetings will generally include both assessments of new subjects and reassessments of subjects previously assigned a risk classification. Teams shall develop a process of documenting meeting discussions, assessments, and classifications of potential target violence threat actors.

Confidentiality regarding identified suspects, along with the proposed mitigation and prevention techniques, is essential. Each BETA Team meeting participant shall be required to complete and sign a confidentiality agreement before each meeting, and these confidentiality agreements will be maintained in accordance with the record retention policy of the Team-Lead agency. In addition, signed attendee rosters from each meeting with be maintained as required by the Team- Lead agency policy.

Threat Assessments

BETA Teams shall utilize the most effective resources available from participating members to assess, manage, and document persons considered threats to engage in targeted violence, and to develop threat management plans that will minimize the likelihood that attacks will occur. BETA Team methods and procedures will vary based on the specific circumstances of the threat and the information indicating the possibility of targeted violence.

It is not the intent for the BETA Team to assume responsibility for other agencies' investigations, but rather to provide guidance and suggestions to responsible agencies throughout the assessment process.

During its meetings, the BETA Team shall determine the appropriate risk level for each identified subject based on the judgment and expertise of the team members. Risk levels are determined by the **Low**, **Medium**, **Elevated**, or **High** likelihood that the identified subject will continue to progress towards planning and carrying out an act of targeted violence. The BETA Team will base its assessment on the totality of information and circumstances and consider various risk factors and protective factors, including, but not limited to:

- Criminal histories

- Interactions with known threat groups or movements

- Known alcohol and narcotic dependencies

- Diagnosis of mental and physical health

- Significant behavioral changes

- Specific statements or threats made

- Access to weapons

- Employment

- Support systems in place

- Available transportation methods

- Subject's motives and goals

- Whether the subject has the capacity to carry out a mass attack

- Whether the subject identifies targeted violence as an acceptable/desirable way to solve problems

- Whether the subject is experiencing hopelessness, desperation, or despair

These or other factors may indicate that a subject is progressing along a pathway to violence.

Once a subject is classified as a threat that subject will then be periodically reassessed by the BETA Team within a time period determined by the BETA Team and based on the subject's threat level. These reassessments may result in no change to the assigned threat level, an increase or decrease to the assigned threat level, or a determination that a subject no longer poses a threat. This guidance does not preclude any personnel or agencies from exercising sound judgment regarding investigative efforts, intervention, or prevention.

Threat Management

Based on the BETA Team's findings and risk level classification, the BETA Team shall develop and recommend appropriate mitigation and prevention activities for each identified subject. These threat management plans, should be documented in a manner established by BETA Teams. Potential elements of a threat management plan may include, but are not limited to:

- Visits/interviews from behavioral health professionals

- Comprehensive behavioral health assessments

- Referrals for mental health treatment

- Social services

- Substance abuse treatment

- Suicide prevention counseling

- Violence Prevention counseling

15

- Anti-gang training

- Anti-hate training

- Programs to decrease the likelihood of recidivism

- Job training

- Discussions with families

- Visits/interviews/arrests from law enforcement officers

Some threat management activities may be implemented and completed in days, while others may take years. Implementing the threat management plan will require extensive coordination

between BETA Teams and the wide variety of public and private organizations that deliver the recommended interventions and threat mitigation actions.

In all cases, teams should monitor the results of threat management activities, consider these results in their reassessments of subjects, and adjust threat management plans as needed based on the success or failure of specific activities.

Handoffs and Coordination

Effective coordination between BETA Teams in different regions and with stakeholder organizations outside BETA Teams is essential to an effective program.

When a subject relocates within Texas to an area covered by a different threat assessment team, the Team-Lead of the BETA team that developed the initial assessment will ensure notification of the appropriate law enforcement agencies (such as the Sheriff's Office, Police Department, and school/college/university Police Departments) within the new jurisdiction, along with the Team- Lead of the BETA team in the new jurisdiction, and will provide all relevant information, consistent with applicable law and policy. The BETA Team in the new jurisdiction will then assume responsibility for continued reassessments of the subject. When a subject relocates to another state, the CID Threat to Life Lieutenant in the last residing Texas region of the subject, will notify the appropriate law enforcement agencies in that state and provide all relevant information, consistent with applicable law and policy.

Within each region, BETA Teams should establish and maintain coordination with partner organizations to ensure shared awareness of potential threats.

Training

In order to operate as effectively as possible, BETA Team members should receive appropriate initial and continuing training and education related to threat assessment and management. At a minimum, all participating personnel will be trained on privacy, civil rights, civil liberties law and policy, along with applicable restrictions on information sharing,

prior to beginning service with a BETA Team.

The Department of Homeland Security National Threat and Evaluation Reporting (NTER) Program Threat Evaluation and Reporting Course has been authorized by DPS to meet the foundational requirements of BTAM knowledge to support BETA Teams.

The DPS CID BETA Program Manager will develop guidance and recommendations for team member training, in coordination with the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement, the Texas School Safety Center, and other stakeholders as appropriate. The BETA Program Manager will periodically reassess training needs and update training guidance in light of program results.
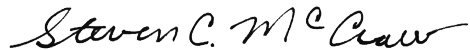

Figure 3. U.S Department of Homeland Security National Threat and Evaluation Reporting Program

Program Governance and Maintenance

The BETA Program Manager oversees the statewide program, ensuring its effectiveness and continuous improvement. This includes reviewing team operations, addressing challenges, and sharing best practices across teams. Regular training, adherence to privacy and civil liberties standards, and effective communication with stakeholders are central to the program's sustainability.

The BETA Program Manager will review BETA team operations and results around the state, identify and address challenges, and identify best practices and success stories to be shared across teams and with state leadership by December 31 of each year.

Official:

Steven C. McCraw

Steven C. McCraw
Colonel / Director
Texas Department of Public Safety

Appendix A: Examples of Major Targeted Violence Incidents in Texas

Date	Location	Description	Number Killed	Number Injured
November 5, 2009	Killeen, TX	Radical Islamist mass shooting attack against military personnel and civilians at Fort Cavazos (then Fort Hood)	14	32
July 7, 2016	Dallas, TX	Mass shooting targeting police officers	5	11
November 5, 2017	Sutherland Springs, TX	Domestic dispute leading to a mass shooting at a church	26	20
March 2-21, 2018	Austin, TX	Bombing spree	2	5
May 18, 2018	Santa Fe, TX	School shooting at Santa Fe High School	10	13
August 3, 2019	El Paso, TX	Racially-motivated mass shooting at a Walmart	23	25
August 31, 2019	Midland, TX and Odessa, TX	Mass shooting by an individual driving his vehicle and then a hijacked U.S. Postal Service vehicle	7	25
May 24, 2022	Uvalde, TX	Mass shooting at Robb Elementary School	22	18
May 6, 2023	Allen, TX	Mass shooting at the Allen Premium Outlets shopping mall	8	7

Appendix B: Legislative References

- Senate Bill 11, 86th Texas Legislative Session

Appendix C: Methodology

- DHS Center for Prevention Program and Partnerships (CP3) TVTP Strategy Prevention Resource

- FBI's document Making Prevention a Reality on the threat assessment process

- Texas Department of Public Safety's January 2020 Texas Domestic Terrorism Threat Assessment

- Detailed threat assessment and management methodologies

Appendix D: Additional Resources

- Texas Crime Stoppers www.gov.texas.gov/organization/crime-stoppers
- iWatchTexas www.iwatchtx.org
- Texas Health and Human Services https://988lifeline.org