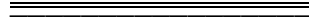


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**Implementation: Officer Body Cameras**



**A Leadership White Paper**  
**Submitted in Partial Fulfillment**  
**Required for Graduation from the**  
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## **ABSTRACT**

Police departments need to change the way things are done. Society has a negative image of law enforcement, and some communities do not trust law enforcement officers. Some people do not even know why officers do some things in certain situations. The implementation of body cameras will show how the lives of officers are in danger and will show what officers did in situations, so the public will have a full explanation of what occurred. This will improve explaining what the officer encountered, what the officer did, and the amount of time an officer had to make a decision. The use of body cameras will remove an officer's perception of the events that occurred and provide true, accurate accounts of the situation. By providing a true, accurate account of the situation, body cameras will show the recorded event as it unfolded, and it will not require filling in the blanks by the suspect, officer, or the community. Law enforcement officers across the nation should implement officer body cameras. Body cameras will improve officer safety, improve community safety, and improve efficiency by police agencies. New technology has given law enforcement a new tool that has shed new light on police interactions. Officers will be able to record incidents and bring more credibility to the law enforcement profession.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Michael Brown case has sparked major discussion on how police work will change. This case alone has impacted the country, causing it to question the use of deadly force by Darren Wilson against Michael Brown. There are many other cases that come up in question as to what really happened. People have come to question why police officers do what they do and the circumstances surrounding that decision. Police officers are questioned by co-workers, supervisors, command staff, governing bodies, citizens, and social media. An officer's genuine words of honesty are not as credible as it has been. Society, with instant gratification attitudes using the internet and the creation of all sorts of social media, has given the opinion that the community cannot rely just on the word of a police officer. The outcome could have been much different in the Michael Brown case if Darren Wilson had the incident on video and was able to use his same words to describe what happened. On the other hand, the capturing of an incident on a body camera could have revealed inappropriate action. According to Hill (2014), it was found that "there has been a steady push for police departments to make body cameras part of their uniforms but movement was galvanized by the death of Michael Brown in Ferguson" (para.3). There was also an indication that if video would have been taken during that incident, maybe the riots would have not happened. This would have shown transparency of this department and would have cleared the officer in this incident.

Body cameras have been around for a short time, dating back to 2011. Police departments currently using body cameras only amount to a small percentage, while many departments are in the experimental and/or implementation stages. There are a

few types of body cameras that are being used. Some of these types include the camera that is placed on a chest, a camera that is attached to glasses, or those attached to a hat. These have changed as the camera changes to smaller units and/or bigger recording areas. Technology will rapidly catch up with the demand to make better cameras and features that come with it.

The implementation of body cameras is crucial to police departments in the nation and will be an essential part of everyday functions. In car video cameras were implemented into police departments, and it proved to be an asset to police departments. In car videos were implemented to record drunk drivers and eventually were used to comply with racial profiling federal mandates. With body cameras, law enforcement will be able to see what is happening in the field of police work, and it will give credibility back to police officers with video proof. This will be something more than just in car video systems. Officers will be able to take the body cameras everywhere they go and record anything and everything they encounter, whether good or bad. In car video only allowed officers to record from their car. At times, situations would occur off camera and the incident would not be documented on video. Mims (2014) stated “When police wear cameras, it isn't simply that tamper-proof recording devices provide an objective record of an encounter—though some of the reduction in complaints is apparently because of citizens declining to contest video evidence of their behavior” (para. 4). Although with the body cameras, not everything will be foolproof at first. Technology will work out the problem areas and provide stability.

Body cameras will bring safety and credibility to the officer. Officers will be able to show what they are doing and will offer a true account of what was said, what

transpired, the conditions, and a video of what ultimately happened. As many things change in the police world such as technology, community, generations, and so forth, police departments will learn to adapt and move forward. Law enforcement agencies across the nation should implement body cameras.

## **POSITION**

Accountability in the law enforcement profession is something that has slowly diminished. Law enforcement has been having to prove themselves time after time. Society and generation gaps have developed a different picture of police. Police were respected and were the ones who told everyone what was going to happen with little to no resistance. Police were the role models of what citizens were supposed to act like. As time has continued, police are running into issues with holding on to that image. Communities demand what it needs and will distort the truth for their own advantage. Courts have torn down cases due to he said she said, and the truth of what really happened is unknown.

Body cameras will be able to show what really happened along with a police report as to what the officer was thinking and feeling. White (2014) stated, "Advocates of body worn cameras state that the video evidence will facilitate the arrest and prosecution of offenders, as it offers a real time, permanent record of the events that transpired" (p. 24). Improving efficiency for police will create a greater trust to the community that they serve. This will be able to make officers create better cases and, in time, will mean less time in court. Body cameras will create a better officer. Officers will be more aware of what they are saying and will want to be professional instead of saying something that could damage their credibility to the public viewing the video.

Officers are more likely to be more aware of their behavior because of the body camera. Researchers found that it was roughly twice as likely for force to be used in the control condition, without cameras, as in the treatment condition, with cameras, and determined that the effect was statistically significant. They hypothesize, based on previous theoretical research, that the change comes at least in part from the awareness of being filmed (Ziv, 2014).

Officer safety is one aspect that will improve with body cameras. During the Michael Brown case, the biggest concern that was brought up was what really happened. There were witnesses who were supporting the officer and other witnesses who were contradictory toward the officer's accounts. Eyewitnesses are not reliable and tend to make up things to support one's own side or beliefs. When the evidence all comes out, the public turns to the media for information. The quality of life for Darren Wilson after Ferguson as described by Hanlon is "unemployed and living in seclusion on the outskirts of St. Louis" (Hanlon, 2015).

Body cameras would allow the courts, community, police departments, and the officer to see what transpired during the public contact. The body camera video would have shown the reality of the case and the details surrounding the decision as to why the officer reacted in a certain way. If the officer only had to defend what he was thinking and feeling when this occurred, the Michael Brown case may have not made the media. If there was a bad decision made by the officer, the police department would be able to identify any officer that made a poor decision and offer appropriate discipline up to termination. Accountability for the officer's actions would come into play. An incident would be judged solely on the officers' actions and not what the public assumed

happened at the scene. Harris (2010) indicated that officers will change their actions and stated, "Head cams can improve police behavior, because officers know that their actions can be observed. Put any other way, any particular set of facts recorded by BWV may sway a judge one way or another" (p. 17). If officers feel that someone will watch video of their incident, they will act according to what the law indicates and will shy away from doing the wrong thing because everyone, such as their supervisor, court, judge, and eventually the community, will judge them when it is all said and done. This will change the way the officer will act when encountering a bad situation and making it into a professional outcome to everyone's benefit, especially the officer.

The community would benefit from body cameras as would the officers. Body cameras would be able to educate the community as to what officers have to do on a daily basis. Video footage would also show time constraints that officers have to make decisions. Community members often do not realize what really happens, rather, base opinions from what they hear on the news, or other people with second and third hand information. With the understanding of the police department, district attorneys, and the media services, videos can be shown to the public after a period of time after an incident with clear indications that the whole story needs to be delivered. Body camera video will never change and time is of the essence. If the community understands why video is not released, then there is an expectation as to why it was not released. These reasons may be something such as the department is still investigating the incident, the video includes explicit images, or it is being used in grand jury cases. Clarity is something to promote public safety, prevent destruction of property, and to gain the trust of the community. Perception by the community about the officer's actions will be



by their own thoughts of what video they watched, not by the media's perceptions or even celebrity input and opinions. Ariel, Farrar, and Sutherland (2015) questioned what citizens truly see and stated, "true, citizens can be very poor judges of what constitutes 'force' and particularly so when it comes to excessive force, but these complaints do provide a glimpse into what the public perceives as 'force'" (p. 522).

## **COUNTER POSITION**

As technology improves and as it makes it convenient to do things, law enforcement agencies tend to realize the cost that comes with it. Police departments often do more with less and are expected to continue on the same path. There are many departments that have been served with legal action against an officer of the department and against the department itself. As these lawsuits come, some agencies will opt to pay a settlement and not go to the extreme of the legal action. This money comes from taxpayers and the law enforcement agency's operating budget or even the officer's personal pocket. Body cameras will show what the true story was and will show how a department proactively has invested into body cameras and training for officers. Complaints about police officers will never go away just like officers' actions will never be all good. Body cameras will allow officers to answer to complaints to commanding officers with video. It will show what happened, with what words, and with the tone of the voice with attitudes from the officer and the citizen. Officer complaints can be over embellished and can sometimes come from a third party, such as a parent complaining for their child. Because of video, a supervising officer may not need to approach an officer in regards to a complaint. All that is needed is the video of the incident and the complaint could be discredited.

The cost of implementation of body cameras will be high at first. There are many grants out to fund different projects. Finding these grants could pay off for a police department. The federal government is funding the implementation of cameras to law enforcement agencies throughout the United States. In December of 2014, President Barack Obama announced that he will seek \$263 million dollars in order to train police and a large portion will buy 50,000 body cameras (Burton, 2014). As one searches for these grants and extra monetary funds, future operating expenses need to be remembered. The push to bring on body cameras to every police department in the country is rapidly moving forward. An example of the push for body cameras was written by Stroud (2015) when they said, "In jurisdictions all over the country, these devices are being requested, purchased with public money, and deployed" (para. 1). The White House lawyer firms and groups that oppose surveillance video are encouraging police department to seek funds that are available so that officer body cameras can be implemented.

Body cameras are there to record and get the situation recorded, but there are many other things to also consider. The issue of where are you going to store it and when can a video be deleted and who has access to video can create more issues with the implementation of body cameras. Video will need to be stored on a computer server that will house all of the videos. Storage issues, such as how long and who has access to the recordings, must also be considered. Furthermore, states have different laws on how long a recording must be stored based on what type of content and how or whether it is used in court (Ericson, 2012). A policy will need to be created detailing which videos need to be stored and the time limit for storage. There are many contacts that

could be deleted as quickly as it was recorded. Creating a process for this should be done as quickly as possible. Agencies should get invested employees to form a committee to come up with this process. Some key employees should be an officer who records with the body camera, the technology department, the command staff, finance personnel and the district attorney's office. Creating this policy and procedure will answer what is best for a department and invested persons. There are other avenues for the video storage needs of a police department such as outside entities. One storage option for body camera video is evidence.com. It provides all the storage you need for a yearly cost, but storage length will need to be addressed. This site will offer many perks for a police department. It can offer accessibility to videos at any time of the day and from any device that can access the World Wide Web. The district attorney's office could be given access to the site and could cut down the cost of coping compact discs.

Another concern is that officers at the foundation of a department, the officers who are the ones recording their contacts, might not buy into the implementation of body cameras. Cultural change is difficult in many areas of the police professions. Officers will either make or break ideas and implementations. Making officers understand that body cameras could help them and the police profession is extremely important. When getting officers to understand that things need to change in favor of body cameras, supervisors can go over the Michael Brown case and discuss how a body camera could have helped in that particular incident. Examining where the officers involved in highly publicized shootings without body cameras can help convince officers to start carrying cameras. Explaining that a simple call can explode into a national

media event could also help get the point across of the importance of a body camera. Commanding officers in a department could implement the body cameras and make it mandatory and continue with normal business. This may still cause problems with the uses as well as the policy and procedures. Officers will accept the implementation with time and easing officers into the idea with a trail period could be useful. Officers could be given time to experiment with the body cameras. Showing officers how complaints are resolved and how lawsuits are dismissed because of body camera video will show the implementation of body camera rates of success amongst officers. According to Miller and Toliver (2014), community support and officer support is needed for cameras to be effective and for the program to be legitimized.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Body cameras in police departments across the nation should be implemented for many reasons. These reasons will not only create a better working environment for officers but for the community as well. The implementation will improve the police department's credibility and earn back the trust of the community. Officer's accountability with body cameras will improve with accuracy in reports and officers will have different attitudes with the knowledge of being recorded. Officer safety will be increased by having a tool to back their story when it is doubted by the community and/or media. Although there are obstacles such as cost, storage, and officer buy in, the results of body cameras will be worth the purchase. There are many grants and federal funds to offset the cost. The cost of legal action on use of force and complaints will decrease. Storage costs can be figured into the cost of implementation and other web companies can regulate storage issues. Changing the police culture can be done

at a slow pace and agencies can show transparency to the public which will slowly earn trust back into law enforcement. Change will happen and the approach will be crucial to the changing times of law enforcement.

The implementation of body cameras should be done with research. Agencies should evaluate different departments and see what types of body cameras are being used. There are many types of cameras with different costs. Agencies should look at the storage capacity of computer servers and find costs of other web based storage sites. Departments should start with a few body cameras or smaller agencies may be able to outfit the whole department. An agency can select an officer based committee that can start implementing and talking about how a new change is coming. Grants should be sought and policies should be written to accommodate the body cameras. When cameras are purchased, agencies should create training for officers, and agencies should begin a trial run. Input should be obtained to create a final policy for a department. Getting policies from different departments and creating a policy to fit a department will be the easiest way to begin. Everyone involved will benefit from body cameras, and that is why all police departments in the nation should implement body cameras for all officers.

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