



POSITION ON PROPOSED LEGISLATION

Bill: HB0187 Public Safety – Law Enforcement – Body–Worn Cameras

Position: Favorable

Date: February 9th 2021

Dear Chairman Clippenger and Members of the Judiciary Committee:

The Maryland Office of The Public Defender is in support of HB187 because in the words of William Sousa, “Body worn cameras demonstrate a police agency’s commitment to transparency and accountability”.¹ 2020 was a grief-stricken year in which hardships were exacerbated for so many due to the devastating loss of unarmed black civilians such as George Floyd and Breonna Taylor. In the wake of these events, I believe it is the duty of this committee and our law enforcement to provide this transparency and accountability that citizens desire.

NPR has identified the shooting deaths of 135 unarmed black men and women by police over the past 5 years.² This is a disturbing pattern that will require several reforms to stop it including officer worn body cameras. The U.S. Department of Justice’s National Institute paid for a study to test the social and fiscal outcomes body cameras have on police officer’s

¹ UNLV News Center. “Study: Police Body-Worn Cameras Reduce Reports of Misconduct, Use of Force”. University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 27 Nov. 2017, <https://www.unlv.edu/news/release/study-police-body-worn-cameras-reduce-reports-misconduct-use-force>

² Cheryl W. Thompson. “Fatal Police Shootings Of Unarmed Black People Reveal Troubling Patterns”. NPR, Jan. 25 2021, <https://www.npr.org/2021/01/25/956177021/fatal-police-shootings-of-unarmed-black-people-reveal-troubling-patterns>

interactions with citizens.³ Using a randomized controlled trial, 400 Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department officers were assigned into one of two groups, a “treatment” group with body-worn cameras and a “control” group without.⁴ After a year into the trial, the number of officers with at least one complaint of misconduct had decreased by 30 percent for officers with body-worn cameras, but had decreased only 5 percent for control officers.⁵ In addition, the number of officers with at least one use of force incident had decreased by 37 percent for officers with body-worn cameras, but incidents of use of force increased by 4 percent for control officers.⁶ Body worn camera officers also gave out more citations and made more arrests than the control group.⁷ The fiscal analysis of this test was also very interesting. The analysis showed that there was overall cost savings due to fewer misconduct complaints and investigations into officer misconduct.⁸ The study recorded that the costs of officer’s body

³ UNLV News Center. “Study: Police Body-Worn Cameras Reduce Reports of Misconduct, Use of Force”. University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 27 Nov. 2017, <https://www.unlv.edu/news/release/study-police-body-worn-cameras-reduce-reports-misconduct-use-force>

⁴ UNLV News Center. “Study: Police Body-Worn Cameras Reduce Reports of Misconduct, Use of Force”. University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 27 Nov. 2017, <https://www.unlv.edu/news/release/study-police-body-worn-cameras-reduce-reports-misconduct-use-force>

⁵ UNLV News Center. “Study: Police Body-Worn Cameras Reduce Reports of Misconduct, Use of Force”. University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 27 Nov. 2017, <https://www.unlv.edu/news/release/study-police-body-worn-cameras-reduce-reports-misconduct-use-force>

⁶ UNLV News Center. “Study: Police Body-Worn Cameras Reduce Reports of Misconduct, Use of Force”. University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 27 Nov. 2017, <https://www.unlv.edu/news/release/study-police-body-worn-cameras-reduce-reports-misconduct-use-force>

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⁸ UNLV News Center. “Study: Police Body-Worn Cameras Reduce Reports of Misconduct, Use of Force”. University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 27 Nov. 2017,

cameras were between \$828 and \$1,097 per user, per year and the cost savings from fewer misconduct complaints and investigations were estimated by authors to be more than \$4,000 per user annually.⁹

The information from this study shows that the level of police misconduct and use of force decreases for officers who wear body cameras, while also increasing police given citations, arrests, and department savings. The implementation of body worn cameras by police increases police transparency, accountability, and is a step towards ending this shameful pattern of unarmed civilian shootings at the hands of police.

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