
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF BILL Senate Bill 661
Public Safety – Law Enforcement – Use of Body Worn Cameras
Judicial Proceedings Committee
February 21, 2024

Social Work Advocates for Social Change strongly supports SB661, which expands the mandated use of body-worn cameras (BWCs) by sworn law enforcement officers regardless of rank while in uniform, in public, and on duty. This legislation is a crucial step forward in enhancing transparency, accountability, and public trust in law enforcement agencies across our state.

Body-worn cameras have become indispensable tools in modern law enforcement – serving as an impartial witness to interactions between officers and civilians, providing a record of events that can protect both officers and the public. The presence of BWCs has been shown to de-escalate confrontations, reduce the use of force, and promote civility in police-citizen encounters. Prioritizing safety of both civilians and all police officers, 74% of Americans believe **BWCs policy protect both those who wear them and those who interact**.¹

By mandating the use of BWCs for all law enforcement officers, irrespective of their rank, SB661 ensures uniformity and consistency in accountability measures. As citizens we hold police officers accountable, but this does not stop on the front lines. Every interaction between officers and the public should be subject to the same level of scrutiny, regardless of the officer's position within the department. The PEW Research Center found that, since 2016, the percentages of people who feel officers are being held accountable when misconduct occurs has declined from 44% to 31%². Accountability must be held in the hands of not only the courts but of higher-ranking officers. **This consistency is necessary to rebuild and encourage trust between police and the public.**

One of the most significant benefits of widespread BWC deployment is its positive impact on public trust. When members of the community know that their interactions with law enforcement are being recorded, they are more likely to perceive these

¹ Cato Institute. (2016). *Americans Overwhelmingly Support Equipping Police with Body Worn Cameras*. Cato.org. <https://www.cato.org/policing-in-america/chapter-4/police-body-cameras>

² Gilberstadt, H. (2020, July 9). *Majority of public favors giving civilians the power to sue police officers for misconduct*. Pew Research Center - U.S. Politics & Policy. <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2020/07/09/majority-of-public-favors-giving-civilians-the-power-to-sue-police-officers-for-misconduct/>



For more information, please contact
Stephanie Feigenbaum
umswasc@gmail.com

encounters as fair and just. The Public Administration Review journal studied the impact of using BWCs and desire for further investigation and found that on average, **civilians were 19.1% less likely to believe an internal investigation was required if BWCs were used at the time of the incident³.**

Social Work Advocates for Social Change urges a favorable report on SB661.

Social Work Advocates for Social Change is a coalition of MSW students at the University of Maryland School of Social Work that seeks to promote equity and justice through public policy, and to engage the communities impacted by public policy in the policymaking process.

³ Wright, J. E., Gaozhao, D., & Houston, B. (2023). body-worn cameras and representation: What matters when evaluating police use of force? *Public Administration Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.13746>