



CITY OF HAGERSTOWN, MARYLAND

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The Honorable Luke Clippinger
Chair, House Judiciary Committee
100/101 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: **FAVORABLE** – **HB748** – Municipalities – Enforcement Officers – Body-Worn Cameras

Please accept this written testimony to request a favorable recommendation from the Committee for HB748, the enabling legislation to implement body-worn cameras (BWCs) for enforcement staff to enhance transparency, accountability, and safety in the execution of their duties.

Enforcement officers, Code and Parking specifically, frequently engage with the public while investigating property violations, issuing citations, and ensuring compliance with municipal regulations. These interactions can sometimes become contentious, placing officers in potentially volatile situations. Implementing BWCs would provide an objective record of interactions, helping to protect both staff and the public.

Benefits of Body Cameras for Enforcement Staff:

1. **Increased Transparency and Accountability**
 - BWCs provide an impartial record of interactions, ensuring that both officers and citizens are held accountable for their actions.
 - Recorded footage can be used as evidence in cases of disputes, complaints, or legal proceedings.
2. **Enhanced Safety for Officers**
 - The presence of a body camera may deter aggressive or confrontational behavior from individuals interacting with code enforcement staff.
 - Video documentation can assist in de-escalating potentially dangerous situations.
3. **Improved Public Trust and Confidence**
 - Demonstrating a commitment to transparency can foster greater trust between the community and code enforcement officers.
 - Citizens may feel more assured knowing that interactions are documented fairly and accurately.
4. **Objective Evidence Collection**
 - Footage from BWCs can provide crucial documentation for court cases, ensuring accurate representation of events.
 - Video recordings can help clarify the circumstances surrounding alleged misconduct or violations.
5. **Reduction in False Complaints and Litigation**
 - The availability of video evidence can help resolve complaints quickly and fairly, reducing costly legal disputes.
 - Footage may protect officers from baseless accusations of misconduct.

Implementation Considerations:

- **Policy Development:** Establish clear guidelines regarding the use, storage, and access to BWC footage, ensuring compliance with privacy laws and best practices.
- **Training:** Provide officers with training on proper camera use, data management, and interaction protocols.
- **Funding and Logistics:** Assess the budgetary requirements for purchasing and maintaining BWCs, as well as data storage solutions.

Implementing body-worn cameras for enforcement staff is a proactive step toward ensuring safer, more transparent, and more accountable interactions between officers and the public. The benefits of BWCs in protecting staff, building community trust, and providing objective documentation outweigh any potential challenges. I recommend a favorable opinion of this legislation by the Judiciary Committee and thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Scott Nicewarner
City Administrator
City of Hagerstown, MD