

# Greensboro (NC): Body-Worn Cameras

## Voiceover

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This is *The Beat*—a podcast series that keeps you in the know about the latest community policing topics facing our nation.

## Debra McCullough

00:08

With us today is Chief Ken Miller from Greensboro Police Department in Greensboro, North Carolina. He is here to discuss his department's use of body-worn cameras, including the challenges to implementing a body-camera program and the benefits that body cameras can have for both police officers and the greater community. Chief Miller, welcome.

## Chief Ken Miller

00:33

Thanks. Thanks for having me.

## McCullough

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How have you been able to get buy-in from your officers on using body-worn cameras?

## Miller

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There's a couple of key points to make, I think, regarding that question. The first is to establish a stakeholder group that involves the different units that are going to be using the cameras or having to process the video. For instance, the officers in patrol or on the street record the video. If it's of a crime scene, the detectives are going to have to review that. The District Attorney or prosecutor is going to have to review that video footage. Potentially it's going to have to go to the defense. Probably, in every state now, it's going to have to go under discovery laws and changes to those laws. It's important to have all your stakeholders involved.

Patrol officers understand their concerns well. As they're able to address their concerns in the discussion process about when and where to record, it helps, I think, alleviate their concerns. They're able to ask questions, give us perspective from an administrative standpoint or an administration standpoint. They can give us perspective that we don't necessarily have from our vantage point in the organization.

So that worked very well for us. The other thing that worked well was that we assigned an internal champion to the camera project to really spearhead the project. That internal champion was a field supervisor who really had a lot of respect throughout the organization. He himself questioned the value

of the cameras. We brought him in, shared information with him, asked him to be on board with it. He jumped right on it and added a lot of credibility to our effort in rolling the cameras out and to the discussions. He helped us think about things that we needed to think about up in the administration.

## **McCullough**

*02:29*

Have you been able to incorporate any of the incidents captured on the cameras into scenario-based training, and do you think that incidents captured by cameras can be used as a training opportunity?

## **Miller**

*02:45*

Actually, we haven't had them out long enough to really roll those pieces into, but we have considered and contemplated that in terms of the policy. Whenever we're wanting to use a video clip, we want to consult with the officer whose video it was and get their buy-in for it. We could make a determination, even if we disagree, to use it but we would prefer to have the officers enrolled in the process.

The other piece for that is that there is training for both the officers and the public, but these are not public records, these videos. They're personnel records or they're investigative records. Because of the way our policy is shaped, our officers are not required to run the video and record the entire time and duration of their duties. When they interact with somebody as a member of the public but it's not an investigative action, they're not required to record. Even if it's a consensual, voluntary contact but it's an investigative action, they're required to record.

We began rolling out the cameras in late June. We do have some video that is of training value. We have not yet incorporated it into specific training programs but we're retaining it so that we can incorporate it into training programs. We haven't finished rolling out the entire department. As we train officers on these cameras, we are using some of these video clips for the initial training.

We anticipate that video, over time, will provide us numerous examples of officers doing exactly what we train and expect them to do, which is reinforcement video for the good things that we do. That there would be video that would show us, either from a communications, a safety, or a tactical approach to a situation that officers could improve and what not to do, and why certain things can cause problems for an officer, or an interaction—or generate a complaint, and overall to lift the performance of individuals and thus the organization. And also, quite frankly, to help our officers understand, just in general, how the value of our perspective on the video—for instance wearing it at eye level so that you get full perspective of an incident from an officer's vantage point—is important to them and to the defense of our actions. I think there's a lot of value from a training perspective and we've only been rolling out for two months—two and a half months.

## **McCullough**

05:27

How difficult was it to develop a policy for body-worn cameras and what elements does your policy incorporate? For example, does your policy address the placement of the camera, storage requirements of the video, routine maintenance of the equipment, or anything else?

## **Miller**

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Actually, our policy addresses everything except what you would call routine maintenance of the equipment, although it does address that the officers are required to verify that the machine is working, that their cameras are working when they get on their shift and that if they're aware that if something breaks or is damaged they're to get a replacement during their shift. From that perspective, it covers about what we need for the officers to consider.

As far as developing the policy, I really think that the stakeholder group took a lot of the difficulty out of that, because they identified where it was important, where we should be cautious. For instance, with investigations, if we have a significant event—an aggravated assault, god forbid, a homicide scene that we respond to—and you have six or eight or ten officers responding to that scene initially, there's generally a fair amount of chaos, initially. Then you move into an investigation mode, right.

You seal off the crime scene and the scene is stable. Witnesses are isolated or taken wherever they need to be. Then you've got scene processing. If you continue to run those cameras on and on, we're going to run significant storage costs for the organization and we don't think that there's really any added value to that because our crime scene unit comes in and they videotape the incident scene. That should be sufficient from an evidentiary perspective. We allow our officers, once the scene is stable, to cut the video, the body-worn video.

The other concern for that that came from the prosecutors and the detectives was the fact that, for every officer, if they're recording an hour or two hours' worth of video and you have eight, ten officers on the scene. Now I have to look through eight, ten hours of video and process that myself as a detective—the prosecutor has to process that. If I'm running even longer than that, six or eight hours of video because I've got the scene secure for that long, there's that much more time and energy, and those are resource commitments. We're conscious of both ends of that, capturing the important information that's really relevant to the videos. It's really important for us to capture the scene and the important things from the scene but not just drag on the video.

## **McCullough**

08:19

How did you determine which officers should wear cameras?

## **Miller**

08:24

We looked at that from the perspective of all of our field operational personnel. We felt that where you have field contact is where 1) most of your complaints come from, 2) where most of your liability and your high-risk incidents occur, and 3) it's where the public perceptions are of the police. It's the police-community interactions that are most significant.

## **McCullough**

08:50

How has the use of body-worn cameras affected the relationship between the officers and the community?

## **Miller**

08:59

I think it's a little too early to say at this point. What I can tell you is that there was a fair amount of media coverage and billboard campaigns by the Police Foundation for encouraging people to support the campaign, and a number of interviews that both I've done and others within the department. The community and the newspapers have all come out and said that there isn't a downside to it. I don't think there's a downside to it for any organization.

## **McCullough**

09:29

Chief Miller, thank you so much for your time and your expertise today.

## **Miller**

09:32

You're welcome. Thank you.

## **Voiceover: *The Beat* Exit**

09:35

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## **Voiceover: Disclaimer**

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