

President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing

Listening Session on Technology and Social Media

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Introduction

Co-chairs Robinson and Ramsey, members of the Task Force and Director Davis, thank you for this opportunity to testify before you about the critically important subject of police body worn cameras. This Task Force is crucial to our understanding of how to increase the trust and confidence all of our communities should have in the police and the road American policing must travel to achieve this. I thank each of you for your service.

I am the president of the Police Foundation, America's oldest non-membership, non-partisan police research organization. Among other things, we do rigorous policing research, organizational assessments and conduct critical incident analyses. The Ford Foundation founded the Police Foundation in 1970 as a way of helping increase democratic policing practices. Our mission is to "advance policing through innovation and science." As such, our only constituency is the truth as we are able to determine it. My testimony today reflects that commitment and my experience as a 37-year veteran of policing practices and research. I spent 33 years as a police officer in California. For the last 13 years of my career I served as the Chief of the Redlands Police Department where we began experimenting with body worn cameras in 2009.

The interest in police body worn cameras on the part of the public and law enforcement has grown exponentially in the last 18 months. Media reports, the Rialto (CA) Police study, convenings of police leaders, the President's proposal to equip 50,000 police officers with body cameras and the increase in citizen-produced videos of police activities popularized by social media have all added to our collective appreciation of their potential value to improve police-community relationships. In addition, the acquisition and use of these cameras by policing agencies is growing rapidly. By some estimates, more than 5,000 agencies have purchased and employed more than 30,000 cameras.

Body worn cameras have many limitations. They are not a perfected technology. They have a limited field of view, they can fall off, they aren't always turned on and there are significant cost and storage issues. Moreover, there are operational issues that are still evolving. Which officers should get them? When should the cameras be turned on? Should there be mandatory or voluntary uses? How accessible should the captured images be? And, how do we deal with the unintended consequences this technology is certain to produce? These are just some of the important questions police leaders are asking themselves, their workforces and their communities. I am confident they will all be resolved soon and policing's "best practices" for their use and appropriate laws and regulations will soon be established.

Perceived benefits of police body worn cameras include increased police transparency and legitimacy, improve police and citizen behavior, compelling evidence in criminal cases and contributions to the resolution of lawsuits and complaints. Concerns about this technology include potential compromises to the privacy of both officers and citizens, reluctance on the part of citizens to speak to officers if they think they are being recorded, the requirement of significant financial investments to acquire cameras and storage capacity that meet strict evidentiary requirements and the potential misuse of police video imagery.

As we advance our understanding of body worn cameras, it is important to understand what we know about them, what we don't know and what the future of this technology looks like.

What We Know about Police Body Worn Cameras

There is a dearth of research about the effectiveness of police cameras. In spite of this, it is widely held that image capture technology is helpful in controlling crime and disorder. Our discussion about body worn cameras can be informed by what we know about other police cameras – to wit, dash cameras and fixed surveillance cameras.

Regarding dash cameras, a COPS-funded study of them by the International Association of Chiefs of Police found that they:

- enhanced officer safety
- improved agency accountability
- reduced agency liability
- simplified incident reviews
- strengthened police leadership; and,
- enhanced officer performance and professionalism.

A study by Temple University Professor Jerry Ratcliffe of fixed CCTV surveillance cameras in Philadelphia found that the police department's cameras were associated with a 13% reduction in crime. In addition, some of the studied cameras reduced serious crime and were associated with a diffusion of benefits out to surrounding streets beyond the cameras' vision.

With this limited research in mind it is reasonable to assume that cameras in cars and fixed cameras can be beneficial. Clearly, more research is needed. Based on this information, we can make some very limited inferences about police body worn cameras that are suggestive they may be effective in certain aspects of policing (I acknowledge there are significant differences in the dynamics of these technologies). Fortunately, there is at least one rigorous study of body worn cameras to help us in our quest to assess the effectiveness of this technology.

Tony Farrar, a Police Foundation Executive Fellow and the Chief of the Rialto (CA) Police Department and Barack Ariel, of Israel's Hebrew University and England's Cambridge University, conducted a seminal piece of research into the impact of body worn cameras in policing. They used a rigorous research model commonly referred to as a randomized

controlled trial (RCT). In this type of study, the people being studied are randomly assigned to either a “control” group that does not receive the “treatment” being studied or a “treatment” group that does. It is widely considered the “gold standard” for clinical studies.

The results of their 12-month study are highly suggestive that the use of body worn cameras by the police can significantly reduce both officer use-of-force and complaints against officers. They found that the “treatment” groups of officers (those wearing the cameras) had 87.5% fewer incidents of use-of-force and 59% less complaints than the officers not wearing the cameras. Clearly, these are significant results.

One of the important findings of the Rialto study was the impact body worn cameras might have on the “self-awareness” of both officers and citizens alike. When police officers are acutely aware that *their* behavior is being monitored (because they turn on the cameras they are wearing), and when officers tell citizens that the cameras are also recording *their behavior*, it is hypothesized that everyone behaves better. The results of the Rialto study are highly suggestive that this increase in self-awareness contributes to more positive outcomes in the police-citizen interaction. This is similar to the “Hawthorne Effect” in which individuals improve their behavior in response to an awareness they are being observed.

There are at least four other Department of Justice-funded research efforts nearing completion or underway in Mesa, AZ, Phoenix, Las Vegas and Los Angeles to study the impact of police body worn cameras. If these studies find results similar to the Rialto’s then with increased confidence we can consider the value of the technology in more definitive terms.

It is important to note that along with the scientific evaluation of this technology is the development of policing’s own set of “best practices.” The COPS Office and the National Institute of Justice have produced guides to assist policing’s adoption of body worn cameras. Model policies have been developed and anecdotal evidence of the technology’s value is spreading rapidly within policing.

What We Don’t Know about Police Body Worn Cameras

Essentially, we really don’t *know* why body worn cameras appear to reduce police use-of-force and complaints against officers. Experience and common sense inform our *beliefs* about why they work, but the scarcity of rigorous scientific evaluations results in a gap in our knowledge about:

- the mechanisms at-play in police-citizen interactions that are susceptible to modification;
- the extent of privacy and confidentiality issues involving the use of this technology;
- the impact on individual officers when their work is highly supervised via this technology;

- the technology's impact on policing culture;
- the long-term impact on public perceptions about the police and the attendant sense of trust and confidence in the police; and,
- how cameras can be used to enhance training in terms of enhancing police legitimacy, procedural justice, officer safety.

The Future of Body Worn Cameras

I believe the various technologies connected to body worn cameras, laws, policies and society's acceptance of them will rapidly change the cameras themselves and how we understand their use. Perhaps a forward assessment of this rapidly changing technology is the most important view of this issue the Task Force can take. Where we will be very soon with these cameras and their attendant technologies is perhaps more important than where we are now. Accordingly, I predict that within the next 5 years:

- our collective knowledge and understanding of the use of these cameras will increase dramatically;
- this increased knowledge will be used to advance training in terms of enhancing police legitimacy, procedural justice and officer safety;
- automated activation of the cameras in enforcement situations will be standard;
- extensive miniaturization of the cameras will be achieved so they are as small as buttons;
- systems that utilize multiple lenses to dramatically increase the system's ability to capture all angles and views of an incident will be developed;
- quality of captured images will dramatically increase;
- streaming, real time transmission of video will be commonplace;
- camera integration with smartphones will be standard;
- software will advance to automate redacting certain aspects of video to protect privacy;
- wide-spread acceptance by police officers will occur;
- innovation will occur in the ways police use this technology, and the video footage it produces, to further investigative and crime control strategies (e.g. facial recognition, network analysis, etc.);
- integration of this technology with other emerging technologies like small, unmanned aerial vehicles (especially wearable and car-based "drones") will;
- many more manufacturers will enter the police market as point-of-view wearable cameras increase in popularity;
- costs associated with the technology will come down and more agencies will employ this technology;
- some police agencies will lose control of their videos and many of them will be unofficially released to the public;
- progressive agencies will use the technology to increase their transparency and accountability and reduce biased based policing practices;
- progressive agencies will find ways to appropriately share the video with their communities;

- legislative evolution relative to cameras use and image retention;
- police policy on the use of body cameras and their footage will develop further;
- the public will gain a more sophisticated understanding of the cameras; and,
- multiple unintended consequences of the technology will occur that will affect public perception, legislation and police policy.

Recommendations

After careful thought about this issue I make the following recommendations for the panel's consideration:

What the federal government should do:

- Increase funding for rigorous scientific research on the impact of police body worn cameras;
- Increase funding for the development of body worn camera technology;
- Congress should approve the President's request to fund police body worn cameras to assist those communities that cannot afford to equip all of their field officers with the technology; and,
- Consider linking federal justice funding to the mandatory use of cameras if rigorous evaluations prove they do in fact reduce police use-of-force, officer complaints and increase public trust and confidence in the police.

What state legislatures should do:

- Analyze public records acts and modify them to comport with the realities of this technology;
- Ensure state "POST" training standards are in-line with the notion of building community trust in the police and address the issues surrounding the use of body worn cameras.

What all policing agencies should do:

- Adequately plan for the introduction of body cameras into the agency by considering costs, policy and practice issues;
- Equip all officers working in communities with body worn cameras and appropriate training;
- Equip every police vehicle used for vehicle stops with dash cameras and appropriate training;
- Equip all officers working in communities with "less lethal" equipment and appropriate training;
- Provide all officers with training in police legitimacy, procedural justice and fair and impartial policing practices;
- Provide all officers with self-mastery training (e.g. *Blue Courage*);
- Assess their policies and practices to ensure organizational alignment with the principles for building community trust and confidence;
- Assess their social media capacity, enhance it if necessary and determine how to integrate the use of body camera footage into their social media strategy.

What communities should do:

- support equipping all of their police officers with body worn cameras;
- work collaboratively with the police to “co-produce” public safety and police responsiveness, transparency and accountability;

Conclusion

As we advance our understanding of body worn cameras, it is important to remember that no single technology is going to serve as the panacea to the tension that exists today between the police and many of the communities they protect. Ultimately, this is a human issue – not a technological one. It is one of relationships. Relationships, that in all likelihood, can be greatly enhanced by employing technological advances like body worn cameras. But, no matter how much we are enamored with technology, we must never forget, that, ultimately, in policing and protecting our communities, only people count. And it is with this mindset that police officers will find the true purpose of their selfless service and the honor that is bestowed upon them upon entering one of our country’s most noble professions.

Thank you.