



Legislative Testimony

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Written Testimony Supporting Proposed Bill 242, An Act Studying the Use of Body-Worn Recording Equipment by Law Enforcement

Representative Verrengia, Senator Larson, Senator Guglielmo, and distinguished members of the Public Safety and Security Committee. My name is David McGuire, and I am the executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut (ACLU-CT). I am here to testify in support of Proposed Bill 242, which would establish a task force to review and make recommendations regarding the use of body-worn recording equipment by police.

In Connecticut, we have enough experience with this technology to know that with appropriate standards and safeguards in place, body cameras serve as a powerful oversight mechanism for police. Recording police interactions with the public promotes police accountability, deters officer and civilian misconduct, and provides objective evidence to help resolve civilian complaints against police without significantly infringing on officer and resident privacy. At a time of heightened tensions between police and communities, body cameras can also help to restore the public's trust in law enforcement.

This month, a study from the San Diego Police Department showed that officers' use of body-worn cameras appeared to benefit the community and police alike. The San Diego Police Department's internal report regarding its body camera program showed significant decreases in both police misconduct allegations and high-level uses of force. San Diego also found that police use of body cameras helped to absolve more officers accused of misconduct and increased the percentage of police misconduct allegations deemed false. Indeed, the city experienced: a 43.1% reduction in misconduct allegations overall; a 47% decrease in complaints related to criminal behavior, discrimination, use of force, or use of racial or ethnic slurs; and a 40% reduction in complaints related to police courtesy, procedure, and service. Critically, San Diego also found a 16% reduction in the use of high-level force, such as physical take-downs, use of chemical agents, or deployments of Taser or other weapons.

Connecticut can and should implement its existing body camera program in a way that similarly benefits police and communities. In June 2015, Connecticut allocated \$10 million for municipalities to purchase body-worn recording equipment for local law enforcement officers. The state also allocated \$2 million dollars to the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection to purchase body cameras for members of the state police. To date, while state police have purchased body cameras, few municipalities have taken advantage of the opportunity to provide their police departments with body cameras free of charge. As of February 1, 2017, the state had used \$870,310 of its \$10 million available to fund municipal police body cameras in the state.

Further study of the use of police body cameras will allow Connecticut to improve its body camera program, which can help communities and police alike. When Connecticut passed its body camera funding law, body-worn recording equipment was still an emerging technology. Since that time, police body camera programs throughout the country have provided insights regarding how to implement body camera programs in ways that balance issues of public safety, privacy, fair treatment, and transparency.

As a result, there are topics regarding police body cameras that are ripe for review in Connecticut. We encourage any study of police body camera use in Connecticut to consider the topic of data retention, including guidelines for flagging use of force incidents or incidents in which a member of the public has filed a complaint. We also encourage studying the issue of public disclosure of police body camera footage, including privacy considerations for people captured on video and guidelines for overriding these privacy considerations in situations in which the need for swift transparency takes precedence. Furthermore, we recommend examining whether officers and their supervisors should be prohibited from reviewing or receiving accounts of body camera footage before completing required initial reports, statements or interviews.

Finally, we recommend studying the issue of data storage options and data retention costs for police body camera programs, including the question of whether third party companies, government agencies, or police departments themselves would offer the best path forward. As removing barriers to body camera programs is in the best interests of police and the public alike, we encourage a body camera task force to explore ways to store body camera data securely, effectively, and cheaply.

Connecticut took an important step toward building community trust in police when it approved funding for municipal and state police body cameras. As the technology has progressed, our state must also adapt. Proposed Bill 242 would provide our state with the information it needs to implement a body camera program that upholds public safety, police-community relations, and privacy alike. I encourage you to support Proposed Bill 242.