

**Six Month Implementation Study of the Columbia Heights Police
Department Body Worn Camera Program**



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By

Sergeant Matt Markham

Introduction

The Columbia Heights Police Department (CHPD) implemented a department wide body worn camera program in February of 2015. A six month study of the program was conducted to determine the impact the cameras have made and what improvements should be made to better utilize the technology. In the spring of 2014 the CHPD conducted an equipment trial on the TASER™ body worn camera system after determining that the body worn cameras were a more feasible option than the current dash mounted squad cameras. The Street Crimes Unit used the Axon Flex™ style of the camera system, which utilizes a head mounted camera. Patrol officers who participated in the trial used the body style camera that mounts to the front chest area of the officer's uniform. After a several week trial, officers reported that they preferred the body style camera. The department purchased body cameras for every officer from the rank of sergeant down to community service officers (CSO) in January 2015. The new body worn cameras were implemented in early February of 2015 after updating the policy on Mobile Audio Video Recording Equipment and Storage and conducting department wide training on the new system.

The study consisted of surveys and the review of existing data. All CHPD sworn officers and CSO's were surveyed except for the Chief, Captain and Drug Task Force Detective. The Chief and Captain were not issued cameras and the Drug Task Force Detective does not use one in his current assignment. Partners with whom the CHPD shares body camera video with were also surveyed.

In addition to the surveys, Captain Austin reviewed officer complaint data for 2013, 2014 and year to date in 2015. The complaint data was analyzed in order to determine if the body worn cameras had an impact on the frequency of complaints and how complaints were investigated.

The survey that was given to CHPD officers and CSOs consisted of nine total questions. Seven out of the nine questions were Likert scale questions with one being the least favorable response and five being the most favorable. Questions eight and nine were fill-in-the-blank responses. The results of the 27 CHPD responses are as follows.

User Survey Results

1. How would you rate the body cameras ease of operation?

Responses ranged from 1 being the most difficult and 5 being easy. The overall average score was 4.52 showing that the cameras are easy to use. Officers with 10-20 years of experience rated the ease of operation lower than new officers.

By Rank

Sergeant	4.8
Patrol Officer	4.3
CSO	5

By Years of Service

0-5	4.83
5-10	4.33
10-15	4.00

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15-20	4.00
20-25	5.00
25-30	4.50

2. Have you experienced any defects with your body camera?

Responses ranged from 1 being several to 5 being none. The overall average score was 4.11 showing that although some defects have occurred; the majority of the cameras have functioned properly. Officers with 10-20 years of experience experienced the most defects.

By Rank

Sergeant	4.00
Patrol Officer	4.00
CSO	4.75

By Years of Service

0-5	4.67
5-10	4.50
10-15	3.33
15-20	2.25
20-25	4.50
25-30	4.50

3. How difficult has it been to tag videos on your body cameras?

Responses ranged from 1 being impossible to 5 being no issues. The overall average score was 4.07. Patrol scored tagging the videos lower than the other users. Patrol officers generate the most videos, so they have experienced more problems than other users. Officers with 0-5 years of service and officers with 15-20 years of service had the most difficulties. (Tagging is the process of assigning a category to each video recorded to determine how long the video will be retained for.)

By Rank

Sergeant	4.60
Patrol Officer	3.89
CSO	4.25

By Years of Service

0-5	3.67
5-10	4.17
10-15	4.33
15-20	3.50
20-25	4.50
25-30	4.50

4. Has the download cord connected to the computers worked well?

The responses ranged from 1 being never to 5 being no issues. The overall average score was 4.15. The scores were fairly close. Officers with 15-20 years of service experienced the most issues with officers with 0-5 years of service coming in second. Patrol officers experienced the most issues, but they also share the most computer work stations compared to sergeants and CSO's who have their own desk and computer.

By Rank

Sergeant	4.60
Patrol Officer	3.89
CSO	4.75

By Years of Service

0-5	3.83
5-10	4.17
10-15	4.00
15-20	3.50
20-25	5.00
25-30	4.50

5. Has the body camera helped you with collecting evidence on an incident?

Responses ranged from 1 being never to 5 being several times. The overall average score was 4.30. The sergeant group ranked the camera as being the most useful for collecting evidence. Patrol officers with 10-15 years of service ranked the cameras higher than the sergeants did. Officers with 20-30 years of service ranked it the lowest for usefulness in evidence collection.

By Rank

Sergeant	4.60
Patrol Officer	4.28
CSO	4.00

By Years of Service

0-5	4.83
5-10	4.17
10-15	4.67
15-20	4.50
20-25	3.50
25-30	3.50

6. Do you feel the body camera protects you from misconduct allegations?

Responses ranged from 1 being not at all to 5 being very much so. The overall average score was 4.52. The sergeant group ranked the camera higher in this category than patrol officers. The lowest ranking officer group for this category was officers with 5-10 years of experience.

By Rank

Sergeant	4.80
Patrol Officer	4.33
CSO	5.00

By Years of Service

0-5	4.83
5-10	4.00
10-15	4.33
15-20	4.50
20-25	4.50
25-30	4.50

7. Has reviewing your body camera footage assisted you with report writing?

Responses ranged from 1 being never to 5 being use it all the time. The overall average score was 3.70. Patrol officers who write the most reports scored the camera the highest in this category. Officers with 0-5 years of experience ranked the cameras the most useful for assisting with report writing.

By Rank

Sergeant	3.60
Patrol Officer	3.94
CSO	2.75

By Years of Service

0-5	4.50
5-10	3.33
10-15	2.67
15-20	4.25
20-25	2.50
25-30	3.50

8. What do you like about the body camera?

In summary several users said they liked the ease of operation, size, and durability, reviewing calls for report writing, and protection from allegations. Below is a list of the responses.

- Ability to review for writing reports (10)
- Ease of use (9)
- Helps with complaints/allegations (8)
- Video evidence of incident (3)
- Everything (2)
- Good/great tool (2)
- People feel comfortable (public) and me being transparent.
- More useful than squad cameras.
- The ability to give video to others such as prosecutors.
- I like we use body cameras and not only head mounted cameras.
- Increased accountability for police and citizen.
- SFST's (Standardized Field Sobriety Tests)
- It provides learning from viewing past incidents.
- Sense of security for mis-allegations.
- Audible tone to remind you that system is recording.
- They work great on domestics when the victim later decides to not cooperate.
- Is nice to go back the call and review what you missed.
- Looking up incidents if I have questions.

9. What could the department do to improve the body camera program?

In summary many did not see a need for improvement while others outlined mechanical issues with their body cameras. Some users thought the tagging of videos process should be improved and be done from any computer. Another common improvement suggestion was to gain the ability to record video from the front of a squad like the former in-squad video cameras. Below is a list of the responses.

- Tagging Process/Computer cord access (9)
- None/Nothing (8)
- Lack of ability to record traffic/sync with emergency light switch (i.e. squad camera) (4)
- Battery life (3)
- During transports it can be hard to hear the people that are being transported in the back seat.
- They don't always turn on well.
- I've also heard the beep & red light indicating they've started recording only to find they are not recording later.
- Body camera & digital audio for domestics and felonies?
- Keep updates-legal-civil issues.
- Not so much dept. but TASER™.
- When camera is worn on uniform with winter jacket zipped no other option.

- Change the policy to say that officers should have camera on.
I feel that the way it is written, officers will be jammed up if they accidentally forget or don't have time.
- Include every member of dept. to use cameras from top to bottom.
- Have (CSOs) have own cameras.
- Obtain more cameras for reserves.
- Reduce fear of misuse by supervisors.
- Creates safety issue playing with and worrying about camera (Officer Patrick's death).
- Policy updates as things evolve and change.

Complaint/Internal Affairs Data

In reviewing internal investigation stats submitted by Captain Austin from 2013 to year to date (YTD) in 2015, I noted a difference in complaints that were resolved by video. Prior to February 2015 most video came from the in squad video system with portable mic. Two cases in 2013 did not have video, because it was not working or available. Two 2013 cases had helpful video. In 2014 two cases had video and or audio available that assisted with the outcome. All but one 2015 case had body camera video available. Of the eight cases that had video available over the past two and a half years, 87.5% of them cleared the officer of the allegations.

Year	Number of Complaints	Available Video Affected Outcome
2013	8	2 (25%)
2014	9	2 (22%)
2015 YTD	5	4 (80%)

Partnering Agency Survey Results

I sent out a separate survey to the Anoka County Sheriff's Office (ACSO), Criminal Investigation Division (CID), Anoka County Attorney's Office, City of Columbia Heights Prosecutor and the City of Hilltop Prosecutor's Office. It should be noted that the City of Hilltop contracts its law enforcement services through CHPD. Investigator Bill Monberg researched the number of cases that were submitted to the Anoka County Attorney's Office since January 1, 2015 that contained body camera footage. Through Laserfiche, Investigator Monberg discovered that 31 cases were submitted to the Anoka County Attorney's Office with body camera video. The partnering agency survey consisted of five questions. The first four questions were a fill-in-the-blank narrative. The fifth question was based on a Likert scale. I received a total of 14 surveys back from partners. The Anoka County Attorney's Office turned in 10 surveys. CID turned in one survey. The Hilltop Prosecutor's Office turned in two and the Columbia Heights City Prosecutor turned in one. I broke the results down by each question asked.

1. How have the CHPD body cameras assisted you with your prosecution/investigation of cases?

In summary one Hilltop Prosecutor did not know CHPD had body cameras. Five other attorneys had not yet had a case with body camera footage. The rest of the results showed that the body camera footage was very helpful. The results are listed below:

- It has made it easier in the sense that the video can be shown to a defendant which is usually followed by a plea resolution.
- It is really nice to have a first-hand perspective much less trying to envision certain things because instead I can actually see them.
- They are awesome. Preserve evidence and convey emotion effectively.
- Critical to have evidence of the event or statements made right when police arrive. Helps make appropriate charging and plea decisions.
- Each case I've prosecuted with squad video has resolved, primarily in my opinion because of the video of either the event or an admission.
- Provided direct evidence of a crime and the investigation
- Two cases. 1. A stabbing where officers took suspect into custody. 2. Suspect accused CSO of sexually touching him.
- I was not aware of the body cameras until one case where an officer referred to it before a contested omnibus hearing.

2. What challenges have you faced in the past six months since CHPD started using body cameras?

A few people did not respond to this question and some responded none. Other stated the following:

- Being able to copy video
- Only that it was unknown based on the police report that bodycam video existed.
- Reliance on body camera footage instead of taking statement or writing full report.
- Mostly just getting the info in a timely fashion. It should not be a challenge to get me evidence.
- Some of the descriptions of events are less detailed because it will refer to bodycam. If there is a significant amount of video it can take a long time to review.
- Didn't know of video until after officer testified and testimony was not consistent.

3. What are your experiences with having access to body camera video?

Several did not respond to this question. Those who did seemed to have varying views.

- Love it. Cleared CSO of sexual assault in short order.
- It would be nice if access was via the web somehow, instead of burning disks?!

- No problems. It has been available when asked for. I have not had any complaints from defense attorneys for failure to get video or any long delays.
- I have only had it in a couple of cases before. It has been a bit helpful but not overwhelmingly so.
- It has been difficult identifying which officers /departments have the technology.
- I have had access to body camera evidence in several cases. I have found it to be very compelling evidence.
- I haven't had any experiences.
- Very easy
- It is not difficult to request when I know the video exists. I have on occasion learned from the video when making other request which also slows down/adds another step to my review process.
- I appreciate the video but it should not be a substitute for investigations.

4. What could CHPD do to improve the body camera program?

Five people did not respond to the question. The rest provided varying responses.

- No worries right now.
- Quicker access to video for on scene review.
- Don't rely on it too heavily.
- More!
- Include at time of case submission either in custody or out of custody and clearly note the presence of such evidence in reports.
- Add more officers to program.
- Despite camera still need formal statements from witnesses that are audio recorded.
- Nothing that I'm aware of.
- I have not had any issues or difficulty to this point.

5. What is your impression of CHPD body camera footage as evidence in a potential prosecution?

Responses range from 1 being no value to 5 being very important. The overall average score was 4.7. Only 10 out of the 14 surveys had a response to the question. 80% scored the question a 5 followed by 10% a 4 and 10% a 3. There was no recorded score below a 3, which overall indicates the body cameras are leaving favorable impression with our partnering agencies.

Conclusion

The body camera program is off to a positive start. User feedback has indicated that the cameras are easy to operate and the video evidence has assisted officers with report writing and evidence collection that is difficult to convincingly articulate in a report. Officers feel that the cameras help protect them against misconduct allegations. Sergeants appear to favor the cameras even more for allegations most likely because they investigate the majority of the complaints. Internal affairs data shows that when footage is available, 87.5% of the time, officers are cleared of any wrongdoing. Although the average Likert scale responses for all the questions were positive the program has areas of improvement from the user standpoint. Users have experienced some equipment defects with the cameras to include shortened battery life and difficulty in tagging videos. Users also expressed their displeasure with the inability to record video from the front of their squad and back seat. Although several users indicated their pleasure with the ability to review video for report writing purposes; it seems as though the video is not being used to its full potential as a report writing aid since this area scored the lowest in the survey.

The body camera program has proven to help prosecutors and investigators do their jobs. The survey results show that most agency partners believe the camera footage is important evidence in a potential prosecution. A concern that came out of the survey is the lack of knowledge that partnering agencies have about the CHPD body camera program. Several partners were unaware of the cameras and many are either misinformed or unaware of the programs capability. Although partnering agencies found good value in the video evidence they wanted to make sure officers still wrote detailed reports and continue to take formal recorded statements from people.

The study indicates a need for CHPD to improve the system for how users tag video evidence. Users should receive additional roll call training to reinforce the importance of using video to aid in writing reports, but not use the video to replace good report writing and the taking of formal statements. Finally, the study indicates that CHPD should formally communicate the body camera program's existence and abilities to partnering agencies.