

## **BJA Body Worn Camera Training & Technical Assistance**

### **Laurie Robinson- Special podcast commemorating the anniversary of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing**

(Dr. Michael White): Hello. I am Dr. Michael White from the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Arizona State University; I am also co-director of the Bureau of Justice Assistance Body-Worn Camera Training and Technical Assistance Program. With this podcast, we are commemorating the one year anniversary of the release of the BJA National Body-Worn Camera Tool Kit, an online resource developed, in part, as a result of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing.

Today I am speaking with professor (Laurie Robinson) of the Department of Criminology, Law and Society at George Mason University about her perspectives regarding body-worn camera. Professor (Robinson) serves as the Clarence J. Robinson Professor of Criminology, Law and Society and George Mason University. And, she's been involved in national criminal justice policy for more than three decades.

In 2014 she was named by President Obama as co-chair of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing which was created in the wake of tensions between police and mostly minority citizens in Ferguson, Missouri, and other communities across the person. The President's task force sought to identify ways to build greater trust between law enforcement and the communities they serve.

This month is also the one year anniversary of the release of the President's task force's final report. Professor (Robinson) was also appointed in 2014 to a congressionally created body, The Colson Task Force on Federal Corrections, charged with examining crowding in the federal prison system. Professor (Robinson) twice served as a Senate confirmed, presidentially appointed Assistant Attorney General for the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice program – the research, statistics and criminal justice assistance arm of the department. Her three years of service in the Obama administration,

coupled with seven years in the Clinton administration, make her the longest serving head of the agency in its 45 year history.

Professor (Robinson), welcome, and thank you for taking the time to speak with us today. To start, can you describe the ways in which body-worn cameras were discussed in the listening sessions before the President's task force both in terms of formal testimony and public comment?

(Laurie Robinson): Yes. Well, first of all, (Mike), thank you so much for having me. During the listening sessions, we devoted two panels at our hearing or listening session in Cincinnati, to the subject of technology. And, we heard from chiefs, from line officers, from researchers, including you, of course, from community members, technology experts and civil liberties attorneys. And, we heard a wide range of views at that session and also from written testimony that was submitted to the task force.

We heard from some of these individuals about experience that they were already having in the field, about operational issues that were not yet ironed out from law enforcement – for example, who should wear the body-worn cameras. We heard from officers and chiefs about issues, about things that are not yet settled about, for example, cost of storage and redaction, about the importance of involving front line officers and unions about getting their input into policies and procedures, about the importance of having model national policies, and about insuring that those policies need to be made local to reflect local needs.

We also heard about down into the detail about the need for chain of custody and about data security and data access, and about the whole area of privacy rights and issues along that line. So, there are really a plethora of issues that need to be addressed in this area. And, we also heard from the researchers and others about some initial studies that have been made, for example one in Rialto, California, which was a randomized control trial, I know you're aware of, that shows that body-worn cameras can actually reduce officer use of force, at least in that study, and reduce complaints against officers.

So, that's an important finding, at least in that study, that shows there can be some real benefits from the use of body-worn cameras.

(Dr. Michael White): Great, (Laurie), thanks. As you mentioned, body-worn cameras were prominently featured in the technology and social media pillar in the task force's final report. And, there were, of course, five other pillars. Could you talk a little bit about how you see body-worn cameras fitting into those other five pillars?

(Laurie White): Yes, well that's really a good question because one of the things that we really saw as we developed the report, (Mike), was that the pillars, even though we had the six separate chapters or pillars, that they really all blended together in many ways. And, all of the pillars were important, but in many ways, the most important was the first on building trust and legitimacy. That was the fundamental kind of grounding of all of the recommendations, and so it was very important that it be the first.

And, the connection there with body-worn cameras and with the technology was that clearly there's an enormous benefit from the greater transparency that can be derived from body-worn cameras. But, it's not just the reality of what can be derived from their use, but we also felt that the very act of a police department instituting the use of cameras, reaching out to the community and saying, "We want to start using body-worn cameras, let's talk about the steps that we'll be taking along that line," that that outreach and steps toward that is part of the bridge building that the President charged us with.

So, these are steps along the way to building trust and building legitimacy for a police department. So, very strong connection there.

The second pillar on policy and oversight, similarly, a strong connection because transparency is one of the issues that's discussed in the second pillar. And, secondly, as I mentioned on your first question, we heard a lot about the need for national standards and model policies. And, here, in that, in that pillar, there's discussion about the need for policy and the need to, on Websites of agencies, clearly post those policies and have them available to

citizens, available to the community so there's a lot of discussion with citizens about what an agency's policies are, and input and back and forth about those.

And, here, we said that there's a need for national standards as policy is being developed about technology, and, also here on particularly issues about privacy and privacy concerns, which we can get into a little bit more.

The third pillar is community policing and crime reduction. And, here what we said about community policing was that it's about working with the community to co-produce public safety. So, this is, really, kind of, a step up from what we might have thought about as community policing back in the '90s when the COPS program was first rolled out. And, one of our thoughts here is the notion of a community advisory committee to help develop policy when you are rolling out new technology, like body-worn cameras.

Because, I think, we also felt today it's body-worn cameras, tomorrow it's probably going to be something like facial recognition technology, and a few years after that, it will be technology that most of us do not yet even, can't conceive of. Maybe you can, but I can't – don't know what that would be. But, it's important to have the community's input on that.

The next pillar, training and education, clearly a lot of nexus here. We said that the Feds should be supporting the development and delivery training that can help law enforcement learn, acquire and implement technology tools, I am reading from our exact recommendation, and tactics that are consistent with the best practices of 21st Century policing, you know, clearly a nexus there.

And, especially, I'd say how cameras can be used in training to enhance police legitimacy, procedural justice and officer safety. Cameras are, and video, are used in all sorts of adult education. So, here is an opportunity to use cameras as a training tool.

And, our final pillar, officer safety and wellness. Here, I think we have some real opportunity. If the Rialto study proves true, and, that we can see a reduction of incidents where officers face risk, there's some enormous benefits for increasing officer safety. And, that's something that really is a win-win for law enforcement.

So, again, enormous nexus with body-worn cameras across all of the pillars.

(Dr. Michael White): Thanks, (Laurie). That's really fascinating because most people will think only of body-worn cameras in that, in that technology pillar. But, really, it represents an opportunity for an agency to do good work in all six of the pillars, really. Fascinating.

If we can turn to a second question, and you hinted at this in your opening remarks, I often say that a body-worn camera program comes with a very high degree of difficulty. Could you talk a little bit about some of the concerns or questions that emerged during the listening sessions before the task force with regard to this technology?

(Laurie Robinson): Yes. And, there clearly were a number of questions, or I would say kind of big questions and concerns. I would say the first one was that body-worn cameras are not a panacea of fix all. They have to be one tool in the toolbox, and that they have to be part of an overall vision for a department about how it will be working hand in hand with the community in a broader program that involves a whole variety of things to really achieve procedurally a fair and impartial policing.

So, it's not going, you can't just go into a very tough, bad situation and say, "Oh, we're going to have body-worn cameras, that's going to fix everything." And, I don't know any police leader who really would assume that. But, I think some, I have certainly talked to some reporters, for example, who have some, I would say superficial views of that.

Second issue, privacy rights both for the public and for officers. And, how officers relate to citizens in the community around that. You know, it's tricky for them. And, this goes to the whole issue of what gets shared with the public and when?

And, related to that, the third issue I would flag here which we addressed in one of our recommendations, existing public record laws at the state level. Many of them, which go back to the Sunshine Laws, I guess back to the '70s or so, which are certainly well intended about all government records should

be open to the public, but many of them in this context, we said need to be reexamined, need to be looked at in the context of privacy rights of individuals where you want to walk the fine line, you want to maintain trust of the community about accountability but with the body worn cameras where you are going into people's homes, filming minors, the question of filming domestic violence or sexual assault victims, what gets shared with the public and when? Very important questions.

And, the final question that I would flag here, the implications of cameras for the relationships, I would say the informal relationships, we want between police officers and the members of the community that they serve. We don't want, we don't really understand, I would say, the impact there yet.

It goes to the question if all of us in our day to day lives knew that we were being filmed constantly, would that change the way we related to people? And, this is simply something that we have not yet fully addressed. And, I suspect this is a question we should include on our list of research topics. So, that, I think, is a very big one.

And, related to that is also the question that everyone these days is a videographer – all the iPhones that exist in the public, even without the body-worn cameras. So, a challenging set of questions there.

(Dr. Michael White): Great, thank you. And, you mentioned research, so why don't we transition to that question. And, you talked about the Rialto study, and I think the Rialto study really sets the tone for the importance of research in this area because of the really extraordinary reductions in use of force and citizen complaints, that you mentioned. So, as you think about, you know, about research, what do you think should be the priorities for researchers to focus on, particularly as we have this widespread adoption of the technology nationwide?

(Laurie Robinson): Well, in addition to what we have talked about, a couple of issues that I would flag, one would be, which is a broad one, technology's impact on police culture. That would be at the top of my list to, in addition to the ones

we talked about to explore. Now, I think that's, from a research standpoint, that's a tough one to figure out exactly how you would get to that.

I think it would be a very, really fascinating one to explore. Maybe it's from an ethnographic standpoint. A second one would be, which many people have talked about, but the impact on public perceptions about these issues, about police and trust in the police, so some citizen survey issues here, perhaps.

And then the third would be to look at, and this might be difficult to get at too, but I am curious about the interaction of body-worn camera videos with social media. I don't know quite how to address that, but it's probably because I'm not an expert at all in social media. It's kind of beyond or below my generation and for future generations. But, how social media has picked up on the video from body-worn cameras and how that has interacted, how they have interacted. That would be an interesting question for me to look at, for example, how that occurred, if it did, in Baltimore or other particular city situations.

(Dr. Michael White): OK. Great, (Laurie), last question for you, it's been a year since the final report of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing was released, and the final report outlined a number of areas of concern, but it also offered a roadmap for positive change. Do you think we have seen positive change in the last 12 months and, if so, could you talk about an example or two?

(Laurie Robinson): I actually am quite optimistic about the response to the President's Task Force report. I have been around Washington for over three, well, I am actually a Washington native, but I have worked in criminal justice for over three decades in Washington and I have seen many, many reports, criminal justice and other type of reports come out, and many of them make a big splash and they get attention for a month or two and then nobody hears about them again.

This report, for whatever set of reasons, and I suspect it is, in part, sadly because of the incidents that have occurred, but has really had some staying

power in the field. A number of chiefs I have talked to and people like (Ron Davis), head of the COPS Office and others who travel around the country a great deal, and just from my observation in talking to many, many chiefs in the field, we agree it would be hard to find a police chief in the country who is not aware of the report and has, at least in a cursory fashion, looked at the recommendations or is aware of the recommendations.

That kind of penetration of recommendations or of a report from Washington is rare. It's very rare. I have worked on many reports with recommendations on a national level over the decades, and it's very, very unusual to get that degree of recognition in such a short period of time. Just a couple of indications of that, just a few months after the report came out last July, the White House brought together mayors and police chiefs from 35 cities to share notes on the steps they were already taking on implementation.

And, I was surprised and pleased at how fast they were already moving ahead. IACP, I think you know is the largest association of police, actually, in the world, they have been working with the International City Management Association, ICMA, they are teaming up with 11 cities whose chiefs and city managers are committed to implementing some of the particular recommendations. Major city chiefs, major county sheriffs and nobles are already committed to working with their members on the recommendations.

IACP has just launched a new institute for community police relations that's specifically targeted to helping their members, which are, they're focusing on small and rural agencies here to provide technical assistance to departments to implement the recommendations. Those are all great indicators.

But, what I particularly pay to, and I go out speaking a lot about the task force recommendations, is hearing from chiefs like the chief in Provo, Utah, or Davidson, North Carolina, or the sheriff in Hennepin County, Minnesota, I was out there two, three weeks ago, or in Leesburg, Virginia, who tell me, "We have taken the report and gone through the 59 recommendations to see how we are doing vis-à-vis those recommendations," or LAPD doing the same thing. And, "We're doing pretty well," or, "Here are the ones that we're

going to have a plan to implement.” Or, you know, “This one didn’t make sense for us to do.”

You know, people don’t necessarily recommend or decide to adopt every one. But, that kind of taking stock around these recommendations, using it as a measure for where they are and where they may need to go, that kind of assessment in the light of where the profession is a healthy, healthy step to be taking. And, in light of the challenges that the policing profession is facing right now, having that kind of set of recommendations or blueprint there, I think the profession is standing up and saying, “This is something we need to do,” and it’s a very healthy step to be taking.

(Dr. Michael White):           Excellent. Thank you, Professor (Robinson). We’re grateful you could speak with us today to share your knowledge on this important topic. We encourage law enforcement, justice and public safety leaders whose agencies are interested in learning more about body-worn cameras to visit the National Body-Worn Camera Toolkit at [www.bja.gov/bwc](http://www.bja.gov/bwc). The toolkit offers a variety of resources that agencies can use to facilitate community engagement, policy development, data collection, training and body-worn camera program management.

We also encourage listeners to share and promote these resources with your colleagues and staff. Lastly, all of these resources, especially the Body-Worn Camera Toolkit, have been designed as a national resource, (pure) resource. Please submit your questions, concerns, and ideas for new content through the BWC support link at the bottom of the homepage. This is (Dr. Michael White) of the BJA Body-Worn Camera Technical Assistance team signing off. Thank you to our listeners for joining us today.

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