

BJA Body Worn Camera Training & Technical Assistance
Sean Smoot- Special podcast commemorating the anniversary of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing

Grant Johnson: Hello and welcome to part 2 of BJA's Body Worn Camera podcast with Sean Smoot from Police Benevolent & Protective Association of and the Police Benevolent Labor Committee and Dr. Mike White from Arizona State University School of Criminology and Criminal Justice and Co-Director of the Bureau of Justice Assistance Body Worn Camera Training and Technical Assistance Program. In this segment, our speakers discuss the important aspects of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing and the future of police reform.

Michael White: The research just have been right at the center of the dialog over the body-worn cameras from the initial to all the study through the other work that has been coming out. Can you just talk a little bit from your perspective what you think the next kind of important questions are to focus as agencies are moving nationally towards rapid adaption and in conversation?

Sean Smoot: Sure. So from where I'm sitting, you know one of the big things is just this kind of overall question as in terms of the return on investment. You know obviously implementing this technology requires an initial investment in equipment and continuing appropriations for management and retention of the data. But I suspect that there will be significant benefits received in the change for those cost, and I think we need to, we really need to focus and measure those.

So you know let me just give you a few examples that come to mind you know investigating crimes and case management can be streamlined significantly. If police departments prosecute offices in the courts you know use the right record management tool to deal with this data. I think that investigations arising out of police citizen interactions, can also be expedited tremendously. This is significant for a few reasons.

One, when you're in investigation that arises out of the police officer citizen interaction, you know one of the things that we found in terms of procedural

justice and in terms of people's citizens and communities views of police departments is that concluding these investigations quickly will go a long way towards instilling trust in the process from the citizens and the communities perspectives.

You know one of the things that we're seeing now nationally when particularly with regard alleged officer in misconduct, one of the major complaints is that you know there's a sense that these things are not investigated when in fact they may be investigated by the investigations just take so long that people feel that nobody is paying attention. The second thing is that concluding these types of investigations quickly is also good for the officer who's involved.

So you know, and what we have seen in Illinois and I've seen around the country with other departments that I've worked with is the fact that an investigation could be completed as easily as having supervisor review the video and find that either the conduct that is complained about, the officer conduct that's complained about did not occur. Or that the officer's conduct that was complained about occurred but was within policy is very, very helpful to the officer in terms of stress and mental health and it's helpful for the citizen as well although they might not like the signing of the investigation, the conclusion of the investigation.

It's not something that they never find out what the result of the investigation was. So you know I can think of a couple of examples, I don't want to take up too much time but we're you know, you have officers who are accused of making certain statements or pulling their weapon or some other type of conduct that a citizen thinks it was not appropriate. A supervisor is able to review that officer's body-worn camera video and the other video that's available from other officers and ascertain very quickly that either the officers the conduct either did not occur.

Or the officer's conduct was within policy, and the fact that we find that out right away and the officer doesn't continue to work for months and months at the time, sometimes years at a time having that investigation paying over their head is of a great value. And the other thing, the final thing at least that I can

think of under this kind of this part of it is this investigations often take a lot of department resources.

And because of the body-worn camera video, they can be completed in fairly short amount of time. And without a lot of effort to get witnesses and collaborating witnesses and so forth because if you have a record, it's there. You know the facts are the facts. On another note, you know there's some researching (metric) in rialto study that shows the presence of body-worn cameras in of itself have a dramatic positive impact on the rates of complaints against officers.

On the use of force incidents and on officer line of duty injuries and looking at rialto and some of the other studies that have been done, you're seeing a reduction in the rights of all three of these categories of things anywhere from a 90 percent reduction to 60 percent reduction. You know I would say in just about any other industry, if you had a 20 percent reduction in these types of things, that industry would be widely adapting technologies. But I think we can need a little bit, we could certainly use a little bit more research along those lines.

The other thing is I think you know would be very helpful to have some research done to see what happens to the rates of law suits that are filed against officers in police departments. Again it wouldn't be surprising to see the results and the date significant reductions on litigation causing claims paid. And you know this type of research would be helpful to state in local government agencies and their insurance carriers.

I'm thinking about some recent cases in Chicago where officers not equipped with Tasers or body-worn cameras. In the amount that the city pays out in settlements, you know reported – I've seen it reported in the Chicago Tribune and other sources that the city has paid over the last decade an average of \$55 million a year. Not including attorneys' fees and costs but just in settling claims. The City of Chicago could equip every patrol officer has with both the Taser and the body camera for about \$7 million a year.

If one incident were avoided and one last claim were filed, the technology would have paid for itself. And we should lose sight of this, we would have avoided a terrible human tragedy as well. And I think the citizens get it, and certainly the New York Times ball that I spoke about a few minutes ago would indicate that they do. By the way, the other thing that citizens said I think it was 91 percent said cameras would help reduce officer involve shootings, the 90 percent which was the next highest response said that increase training would help reduce officer involve shootings which I thought was very helpful as well and also coincided with the findings of the task force.

Michael White: Great. Thanks, Sean. As you indicated, lots of important questions still to be investigated. As you mentioned earlier in the interview, this month also represents the one year anniversary as a release to the final report of the president task force on 21st century policing. The final report outlined a number of areas of concern but also offered a roadmap for positive change. Could you just tell us what do you think there's been positive change that has occurred over the last 12 months and if so can you site an example or two?

Sean Smoot: Sure, well I first call I think that you know conversations like the one we're having right now, the fact that they're happening and they're happening not just in the United States but even overseas and across the world. I think that and of itself is pretty positive that folks are really focusing on and thinking about these issues and ways to address them.

In addition to that, though I know you know, I think the task force report has really helped to refocus research and Department of Justice grant opportunities. I've seen over the last 18 months or so the grant solicitations and proposals, several proposals that have been made really hone in on the assessment of factors and techniques that have some practical efficacy for the field and law enforcement, and I think that's a tremendously positive.

Some of these projects and a lot of the research that will be forthcoming will be fuelled by another very positive off shoot of the task forces working that's the police data initiative the PDI and I think the police data initiative will provide essential data for continued and future research as well. So I can view

that as a very positive thing, and then you know there's just been a very real recognition.

I think amongst law enforcement executives, and rank-in-file groups, and community groups that we've got some real serious problems and that we can work together and work on those solutions. And a lot of work has been done in the area of police training where as a result of the task force's recommendations jurisdictions are now mandating training for police at both the academy and in service level on topics that we're previously neglected or completely ignored.

And so I'm thinking about topics like procedural justice and cultural competency, implicit bias, proper use of force and authority, addiction, dealing with the mental illness crisis. These are all things that many jurisdictions are now building in to their training curriculum both at the academy level and then also in in-service training so that officers who are already working and on the job can be exposed to these issues and develop the tools necessary for them to do the good work that I know they want to do.

Michael White: Thanks so much, Sean. We're very grateful that you could speak with us today and share your knowledge and thoughts on this important topic. We encourage the law enforcement, justice, and public safety leaders whose agencies are interested in learning more about the implementation of body-worn camera programs to visit BJA's National Body-Worn Camera full kit that can be found at www.bja.gov/bwc.

This tool kit offers a variety of resources that agencies can use and facilitate community engagement, policy development, data collection, officer training, and body worn camera program management. We also encourage listeners to share and promote these resources with our colleagues and staff. Lastly, all of these resources especially the National Body-Worn Camera tool kits, have been designed as a national resource, your resource.

So please, if there's any questions, concerns, and ideas that you have for consent through the BWC support link at the bottom of the home page. This

Dr. Michael White of the BJA Body-Worn Camera Training and Technical assistance team signing off. Thank you to our listeners for joining us today.

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