

**Bureau of Justice Assistance
Body-Worn Camera Podcast Interview
Dennis Slocumb**

Carmen Facciolo: Hello, I'm Carmen Facciolo, a policy advisor with the United States Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance, and today I'm speaking with Dennis Slocumb as part of BJA's Body-worn Camera Podcast Series. Dennis Slocumb was elected to the position of Executive Vice President of the International Union of Police Associations in July 2000 and re-elected in 2004 and 2008. He resigned from his position as Vice President in late 2012.

At the IUPA Convention, Mr. Slocumb was voted to be given the honor of being named the Vice President Emeritus. Mr. Slocumb now serves as the Principal IUPA Legislative Liaison for the United States Congress and the Administration on Federal Legislation effecting law enforcement officers and emergency medical personnel. He comes to the IUPA from the Los Angeles County Professional Police Officers Association, which represents over 6,000 sworn and non-sworn law enforcement professionals.

Mr. Slocumb is a 32-year veteran in the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department where he has performed a variety of assignments in patrol and detective units, including time with a special investigation field and attained the rank of Detective Lieutenant. In 1998 Mr. Slocumb was elected to serve as the President of the PPOA. In addition to his long and dedicated service with the Sheriff's Department, Mr. Slocumb also served for four years in the United States Navy, including a tour aboard the USS Kearsarge as an Aviation Anti-Submarine Warfare Technician, flying in Grumman, S2F Tracker aircraft.

**Bureau of Justice Assistance
Body-Worn Camera Podcast Interview
Dennis Slocumb**

He holds degrees from the University of California at Redlands and Compton Junior College. Mr. Slocumb thank you for speaking with me today. To start, can you explain what some of the most important items a police chief should consider when deciding to implement a body-worn camera from the union's perspective?

Dennis Slocumb: Well, thank you for having me. I appreciate the opportunity. One of the things I'd like to say in preface to all of this is there's between 800,000 and a million cops in America today. And we have to keep in perspective that nobody calls them when their ribs are coming off the barbecue and the ice cream is ready to come out of the freezer. They call them when people are at their worst, when they're afraid, when they're drunk, when they've been hurt, when they're angry, when emotions are boiled over. And we send them young men and women in their 20s generally to rectify whatever situation they're facing. Almost every single time, 24 hours a day, seven days a week from the Atlantic to the Pacific they go and solve the problem successfully.

When they don't, it becomes news, which I suppose is good news. Keeping that in mind, the chief needs to consider a whole lot of things. One of course is the cost. Secondly, I should think that they have to carefully consider how to weigh the public's concern for transparency with the public concern and public interest

**Bureau of Justice Assistance
Body-Worn Camera Podcast Interview
Dennis Slocumb**

in confidentiality and privacy. I think it's a foregone conclusion that body-worn cameras are coming nationwide and I think that that's a good thing.

I think the chiefs are going to have to decide on those policies that govern the issues I talked about and I should hope that they would, in formulating those policies, be inclusive of opinions that come from our members, the rank and file law enforcement officers that are going to be wearing these cameras as well as from the public, from the community, from the news media, from the political entities who are going to be impacted by the issues that these camera will raise.

Carmen Facciolo: Thank you for that perspective. From your perspective as an officer, could you tell me what are some of the biggest fears that officers have about body-worn cameras?

Dennis Slocumb: Well, I suppose the biggest fear is that people are going to see footage from a camera and jump to conclusions before all the facts are known, that people are not going to realize or are going to have to be educated to realize that that camera doesn't see everything the police officer is seeing and the police officer isn't seeing everything that camera is seeing. In critical situations officers frequently get very tunnel vision and get focused on wherever the threat is. And recaps of events have shown that their mind blocks out those things that aren't relevant to the immediate threat or the mind doesn't perceive as relevant to the immediate threat.

Bureau of Justice Assistance
Body-Worn Camera Podcast Interview
Dennis Slocumb

So their fear is that these footages will be released prematurely, that people will jump to conclusions and that those in power, political people particularly, will feel obligated to make comments, statements or judgments prior to all the facts being on the table. I would say those are the biggest fears we have.

Carmen Facciolo: And as we think through these fears, are there policy considerations that would help alleviate the officers' fears here?

Dennis Slocumb: Well, a reasonable policy that addresses those things, education is to the limitations of those cameras. I forgot to mention one other fear that we have and I don't know that it's a fear, I think it's just a realization of a reality and that is that people in neighborhoods where cooperating and the police is a dangerous thing to do, are going to feel far less inclined to talk to a policeman if he knows his face and voice is being recorded. We've all seen the signs posted in some of the inner cities, "snitches get stitches", and having worked in the inner city in Los Angeles I can tell you there are a lot of people with very justified fears about talking to the police when they have information.

And it's something we're going to have to overcome. We're going to have to convince people that these things can remain confidential, that they're not going to be on YouTube tomorrow and in the coroner's office the next day. And I think if we involve all of the stakeholders and policy formulation and I think that if we educate management, the officers and the public as to the scope and the limitations of these cameras we can alleviate some of those fears.

Bureau of Justice Assistance
Body-Worn Camera Podcast Interview
Dennis Slocumb

Carmen Facciolo: Understood. Thank you. And drilling down on this some more are there specific policy implications or things that the International Law Enforcement Officers Union is looking to address?

Dennis Slocumb: Yes, we're trying to address those fears that I've already articulated. It's no secret that municipalities and states across the country are still having problems fiscally. These cameras, the storage, the security required for them and the maintenance of them is not without cost. And one of our concerns is that there's going to be a tradeoff and one of the fears that the International has is that tradeoff might be in training, equipment or even personnel in order to fund these cameras. The federal government has stepped in. I think they've put forward 20 million dollars.

It sounds like a lot of money until you realize how many police officers are on the street and granted you don't have to have a camera for every police officer, many of them are working in positions where they don't have that much contact with the public, but if you're just talking about the uniformed officers driving around in their marked radio cars and answering calls you're still talking about a substantial sum of money and we just hope that they're not sacrificing staffing needs and equipment needs, other equipment needs and training to fund these cameras.

Carmen Facciolo: Great. And what is the most important advice that you would give someone who is considering implementation of a body-worn camera program?

**Bureau of Justice Assistance
Body-Worn Camera Podcast Interview
Dennis Slocumb**

Dennis Slocumb: I would say the most important advice I would offer is to involve everybody in the formulation of policy. Everybody's looking at this from a little different perspective. I mean there are those whose interests would be served in being able to show that the police are out doing the right thing, there are those whose interest would be served by showing that the police are out doing the wrong thing. There are liability issues. There are the public's right to know versus the right to privacy as we've already discussed.

And I think all of those stakeholders need to have a seat at the table when these policies are being formulated. And we're hopeful that they can come to some sort of compromise that satisfies all of those issues.

Carmen Facciolo: Great. And lastly, you attended the BJA Body-worn Camera Expert Panel at the White House a few months ago where you helped lead a group discussion on union, and labor organizations involving Black, Hispanic, Tribal, and local national unions. What would you say was your biggest take away from that discussion?

Dennis Slocumb: Well, first of all I'd like to thank BJA for facilitating that discussion. I thought it was incredibly valuable. It gave us insight into other people's issues and hopefully gave them insight ours. But I think when I walked out of there in speaking with people from some of the other organizations the thing that amazed me most is how much we agreed on the issue of body cameras.

**Bureau of Justice Assistance
Body-Worn Camera Podcast Interview
Dennis Slocumb**

I think the rank and file police officers will benefit from having these cameras. They've already benefited a great deal. I mean there has been numerous false complaints that were exposed by body cameras that people didn't know were being worn. I mean recently there was one that involved a former professional football player and I believe that was in Texas. I think that we all see value in the cameras and the take away I got from it was that there's more we agree on than disagree on in the implementation of body-worn cameras.

And I just think that dialogue can help to resolve a lot of those issues. We're not going to satisfy everyone. We probably won't be 100 percent satisfied. But I think there can be a reasonable accommodation that satisfies the bulk of everyone's concerns.

Carmen Facciolo: Thank you. And thank you for participating in this podcast. We are 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 the implementation of a body-worn camera program to visit the body-worn camera toolkit at www.bja.gov/bwc.

This toolkit offers a variety of resources that agencies can use to help with adoption and use of community engagement, policy development, data collection, officer training and educational purposes. We also encourage listeners to share some of these resources with your colleagues and staff. Lastly all these resources,

**Bureau of Justice Assistance
Body-Worn Camera Podcast Interview
Dennis Slocumb**

and especially the body-worn camera toolkit, have been designed as a national resource, which is your resource. Please submit your ideas for new content through the BWC support link at the bottom of the home page. This is Carmen Facciolo at the Bureau of Justice Assistance signing off. Thank you to our listeners for joining us today.

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