

BJA Body Worn Camera Training & Technical Assistance Dallas Police Department BWC Study Podcast

(Todd Maxwell): Hello, this is Todd Maxwell, part of the Bureau of Justice Systems Body-Worn Camera team, and today I'm speaking with Dr. Melinda Schlager, Executive Director of the Caruth Police Institute in Dallas, Texas. Dr. Schlager is joined today by Deputy Chief Andy Acord, and Deputy Chief Paul Stokes of the Dallas Police Department.

In addition to serving as the Caruth Police Institute's executive director, Dr. Schlager is also an Associate Professor of criminal justice at the University of North Texas at Dallas. Her research interests include offender entry, community corrections, policy, planning, and criminal justice management. Dr. Schlager has also implemented evidence-based practices as Deputy Director for the Dallas County Community Supervision and Corrections Department and in New Jersey as Director of policy and claims for New Jersey State Parole Board.

Deputy Chief Andy Acord began his career with the Dallas Police Department in 1980. Since then, he has served on numerous boards and committees including the North Texas High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area Executive Board, Dallas Alliance for Drug Endangered Children, co-chair, and Prostitution Diversion Initiative, New Life board of directors among others.

Deputy Chief Paul Stokes is a former marine and 27-year veteran of the Dallas Police Department. He's held multiple leadership roles and public information and specialized workgroups including implementation in new technology and bait car programs, overt camera projects, in-car video, and body-worn camera.

Dr. Schlager, Deputy Chief Acord, Deputy Chief Stokes, thank you all for speaking with me today. And to start, Dr. Schlager, can you give our listeners an overview of what the study is about and what you hope to learn from a research perspective?

(Dr. Melinda Schlager): Sure. First of all, good morning to everybody. We are glad that you asked us to come in here from Caruth Police Institute and Dallas Police Department to talk about this study. We're – I think, we're really thrilled about the opportunities that we have here.

The study really has three principle parts. It's – the first part is, we will be comparing a matched sample of people who wear cameras, of officers who wear cameras with a group of people who don't, and we will be comparing things like use of force complaints, commendations, those kinds of things. We are doing that principally because the Dallas Police Department has asked to do so in an effort to help them better manage their resources.

But because we have this – because of the way the study is designed with a group of people who wear – who will wear and not wear cameras, we were also very interested in looking at the police legitimacy component of the use of cameras and day-to-day police-citizen interactions, and that is probably from an academic standpoint, perhaps one of the most interesting components of our study.

So, what we are doing is, we will be pulling call logs from the sample who wear cameras and sample who don't, and then what we will be doing is sampling further and reaching out to these people. Kind of like when you take your car in for service, the next day you will get an email or a phone call asking you how your service was.

And so, our citizen satisfaction surveys will be exactly the same with respect to body cameras. We will pull those call logs and will sample a group, and we will be having interns who call citizens, who've had a police-citizen interaction and ask them about the content or the construct of that particular interaction. That will include specific questions about whether or not an officer was wearing a camera, and then to some degree, more broad questions about legitimacy in general, so we will be looking specifically a legitimacy as it relates to the camera, and then, in the larger form, as it relates to legitimacy of police in general.

The other component of what we're doing are a series of focus groups. We are focused – we will be hosting focus groups with five different constituencies, officers who wear cameras, supervisors of officers who wear cameras, police associations which are the equivalent of unions here in the City of Dallas for police officers, the media, and then also community members. And we have again, a series of questions that we will be asking particularly as they relate to police legitimacy, so, we're interested in use of force and all of those good things so that we can help the police department better do their job, but the real focus of this study for us at the Caruth Police Institute is to look at police legitimacy.

(Todd Maxwell): Thank you. That was probably the first time I've heard media be involved in a questionnaire in average. I will be interested to see how that goes.

(Dr. Melinda Schlager): Yes, us too.

(Todd Maxwell): Deputy Chief Acord and Deputy Chief Stokes, this question is sort of about the Dallas PD, and could you tell us why you decided to get involved with a research partner and wanted to have this study done?

(Deputy Chief Andy Acord): Well, couple reasons. Well, first of all, the chief of police wanted us to, and secondly, to me, it's a question of why not? As you heard Dr. Schlager say, the Dallas Police Caruth Institute is located here in Dallas Police Headquarters, and with her and her staff, they conduct research

on various things that we do in addition to the body cameras, so, it was just a perfect atmosphere for us to utilize this resource and I feel like we would be remised if we had not.

And so, you know, we're looking forward to see what the research entails and see what we can glean from that and see what kind of impact it will have on our body camera program and if we need any adjustments to it or not.

(Dr. Melinda Schlager): Chief Stoke?

(Deputy Chief Paul Stokes): With Chief Acord and myself, when we got involved in this project, everybody went back to the Rialto study on how it would impact the police departments, reduce complaints, reduce use of force, and that really snowballed on all the conferences that Chief Acord and I went through, we just kept hearing, it was the theme. So, it's exciting that we're going to have a research partner who's actually going to have a very structured research criteria that either can validate that or not, to see if it is truly a – the next big thing in police work.

(Todd Maxwell): Yes. Interesting. Now, I was recently at an event and they had, I believe, it was Edmonton was there and all the studies I have been reading so far supported the initial findings of Rialto, but I don't know if it's because they're a different country or they have different police scene issues in Edmonton, but they were saying that they didn't see the same effects, so I will be interested to see how your research comes out.

Earlier, you guys mentioned – the doctor mentioned that you guys plan to do community outreach, and could you guys sort of elaborate how you plan to do that and why you feel community's feedback is so important?

(Deputy Chief Andy Acord): Well – and this is Chief Acord. When it comes to the community feedback, that's instrumental in most of everything that we do, and so, it's important that we get their feedback on this issue as well as we do with many other things. In my view, this will also assist another piece of our community policing efforts to get our feedback or build up legitimacy with them by doing so, and I think we're also being more transparent as we do that, which is really in the end, kind of what the Body-Worn Program is really all about.

(Deputy Chief Paul Stokes): I think when we do community outreach, it broadens the scope of just – of the slicing from the community. If we have the community groups that they're actually engaged in answering questions like Dr. Schlager said regarding an experience with the police department that's specific to their incident. When we go to community groups, they may not be part of the study, but they're very vocal, and they have pulse of what's going on in the city and the community.

So, just like we talked about crime, we can help people all day long and there's a reduction of crime, but unless the community believe that there is – that their community is safe, and that's the perception, it's really hard to validate that, it's got to be what they feel. So having a discussion with a community that's not part of the study, that just gives us another angle to look at, to see how this program is come along.

(Todd Maxwell): Great. And doctor, did you want to elaborate on how you're going to do some of this outreach – you briefly talked about it earlier, but you know, just to give us a little bit more.

(Dr. Melinda Schlager): Sure. We're planning to do – well, we were planning to do three sets of focus groups, the problem is, this is a six-month study, so we may not be able to do that, we may only be able to do two sets of groups. One, at sort of its inception and then one after we're done about six months from now. But the idea is to – as I said, the questions that we're asking – so, there's quite a bit of overlap in the questions that we're asking with the five different constituencies that we will be addressing in the focus group. Part of that was to look for some parity or not, in answers between all of the different constituencies. But of course, the other part, the, you know, one of the real foci of this is to look at police legitimacy.

We are – you know, we and the department are very interested in understanding how the department in particular, but I think police in general, can better provide a service to the community in a way that boasts the community values and sees as legitimate. So, the questions that we're asking, you know, have to do with perceptions, obviously, you know, and when you're in focus group situations, the folks in the room are talking about not their perceptions or concrete experiences.

But when we are able to sort of triangulate even though there's five different groups, but triangulate the information between all of these different constituencies, we feel like we'll have a much more robust and sort of three-dimensional view of this idea of legitimacy, then perhaps, just if we went out and talked to community members or, you know, if the officers went out and talked to community members, so we're very much in tune and, you know, with the effort to really try to get a 3D view of what this is going to look like.

(Todd Maxwell): Great. Thank you. A big part of, as we heard, of the study is officer and community perception, how does the Dallas PD plan to integrate the results of the study into your BWC program?

(Deputy Chief Andy Acord): Well, I think that would depend on the results of the study. Once we learn that, we will see what kind of impact it has on us, you know, whether it be from a policy perspective or is this something we actually need to change from an operational perspective, and so, we will see what the information entails and then go from there.

(Todd Maxwell): OK. And how many officers do you have with body-worn cameras?

(Deputy Chief Andy Acord): Currently, we have about 290 officers. Our Body-Worn Program is scheduled to purchase a thousand cameras which we're on a process of doing, and our plan is to have our thousand cameras on the streets around probably, late summer.

(Todd Maxwell): Will that coincide with this study or the study would be halfway through by then?

(Dr. Melinda Schlager): Well, the study's starting really – it started this month, so we hope to finish about the time that they roll out the additional cameras, and...

(Todd Maxwell): OK.

(Dr. Melinda Schlager): ...all of this is orchestrated like a well-oiled symphony if I may say so.

(Todd Maxwell): Understood. One of the big benefits or one of the big recommendations that BJA has had with the grant solicitations that came out for our pilot implementation programs has been collaboration and working with research partners, are there any other benefits to the partnership between your two parties besides the one spelled out in the abstract? Like, have you guys offered policy review or any feedback on policies or implementation strategies?

(Dr. Melinda Schlager): Well – so, I'm not sure how much – I mean, you've mentioned that you went to our website which is great and hopefully that gave you a good sort of 65,000-foot view, but the Caruth Police Institute is truly the only entity-like – we are the only one around. We are embedded in the police department, we're sitting on the first floor of the police department right now, we live here, we exist in the day-to-day activities, we – you know, our Caruth Police Institute staff engage with, you know, folks like Chief Acord and Chief Stokes and may others on a day-to-day basis, so we are very much in tune with what's going on in the department, the various aspects of initiatives that may be going or being pushed forward.

We provide research support for the department, but we also provide professional development training opportunities. We – everyone at the Dallas Police Department from sergeant and above at this point, goes through one of our courses which provides a foundational understanding and areas of management and leadership decision-making and communication. We do provide these opportunities to people outside of DPD, but DPD, Dallas Police Department has been our primary and consistent client since 2008 when we came to – came into being.

The other part of it that's particularly interesting is that of course, we're affiliated with the university, the University of North Texas at Dallas, and so, you have a university component, you have the practical application component, and then you have the research component, so that very much makes us a unique entity. We've – I know – I've only been here about a year, a little over a year, but I know that prior to my arrival, CPI was involved with helping the police department write a strategic plan. Currently, we're assisting the department with a variety of other initiatives in the training area, so, I mean, we're involved in a lot of different things outside just, you know, solely research. Chief, did you want to chime in?

(Deputy Chief Andy Acord): Well, there's really not much more to add to what Dr. Schlager had mentioned, and again, yes, it is unique in – at Dallas PD compared to other departments across the country, and it's been – I can tell you, it's been very effective, very beneficial to have such a system set up within DPD. It's hard to imagine operating without them now.

(Todd Maxwell): Thank you. Yes, when I went to the site and I was reviewing and doing some research on this, it looked – I could see some of that, but thank you for elaborating more on the institute. I saw the research component and the affiliation with the university, but you are correct, this is a unique institution and partnership and collaboration that I haven't seen at a lot of other universities and police departments.

(Dr. Melinda Schlager): Yes. It's a really great opportunity, you know, depending on which lens you're wearing at the moment, you know, it's just – it's a really great opportunity for us at CPI, but I think also for the department. We, you know, we talk, we communicate, we ask questions, we collaborate, we, you know, constantly looking for more information and, you know, our – one of our goals whether it be the Dallas Police Department or anywhere else, is to help police officers better do their jobs, and so hopefully, we've contributed in at least a small way here at DPD.

(Todd Maxwell): Well, my last question might seem sort of redundant then because it sounds like you guys have a – would recommend the collaboration effort, but one of the things we like close out with if you guys recommend being involved in a research project with a police department for these type of issues like body cameras and perceptions, and if you encourage other agencies to be involved with research projects and with a research partner, and if so, why?

(Deputy Chief Paul Stokes): I absolutely would recommend it. I just believe having somebody else looking at it from their perspective, drawing a different criteria that we may not have thought about really gives it a whole different perspective, and then I think the more input we have from different agencies across the country, even though police work is essentially the same, there are nuances in every part of the country and every agency, so I believe just a

collaboration and bringing all that data together to formulate a more solid opinion is very beneficial.

(Deputy Chief Paul Stokes): Yes. Todd, I think the question is more to me would be, why not?

(Todd Maxwell): Understood. Thank you. Thank you, Dr. Schlager, Deputy Chief Acord, and Deputy Chief Stokes. We are grateful you could speak with us today and share your knowledge on this important topic. We encourage the law enforcement, justice, public safety leaders, and whose agencies are involved in, learning more about the implementation of body-worn camera programs to visit the body-worn camera toolkit at www.BJA.gov/BWC. This toolkit offers a variety of resources that agencies can use with the adaption and use for community engagement, policy development, data collection, officer training, and educational purposes.

I also encourage listeners to share and promote these resources with your colleagues and staff. Lastly, all of these resources and especially the body-worn camera toolkit have been designed as a national resource, your resource, so please submit your ideas for new content through the BWC support link at the bottom of the homepage.

This is Todd Maxwell signing off, and thank you for joining us today.

(Dr. Melinda Schlager): Thank you.

(Deputy Chief Andy Acord): Thank you.

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