Body Worn Camera Training and Technical Assistance
Waynesboro Police Department

Todd Maxwell: Hello again listeners, welcome back. This is Todd Maxwell again, a member of the Bureau of Justice Assistance Body-Worn Camera team. And today I'm speaking with Chief Mike Wilhelm.

Chief Michael D. Wilhelm was appointed to the rank of chief of police on May 3rd, 2011. Chief Wilhelm has been with the Waynesboro Police Department since December 1995 where he began his career as a patrol officer. He's promoted to the rank of corporal in 2000 and served at the department as a detective supervisor.

In 2004, he is promoted to the rank of sergeant and served the department as patrol chief commander. During his tenure with the police department Chief Wilhelm has served as patrol officer, patrol supervisor, detective, detective supervisor and narcotics investigator, SWAT team commander, and department accreditation manager.

Chief Wilhelm graduate from Radford University with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Criminal Justice in 1994. He is currently member of the International Association of Chiefs of Police and the Virginia Association of Chiefs of Police. Chief Wilhelm is also very active serving on several local community boards including the Valley Children's Center Board and the Blue Ridge Criminal Justice Board.

Chief, thank you for speaking with me today.

Michael Wilhelm: Well, thanks for having me on Todd.

Todd Maxwell: Before we begin, can you give us a little bit of background about your agency and its size so listeners have some relevancy?

Michael Wilhelm: Sure. We're located in Central Virginia about 30 minutes west of the University of Virginia and about 30 minutes south of James Madison University. Our agency is 50 sworn police officers. We've got about 13

civilian staff and also a 12-person auxiliary police unit, which is also fully sworn.

Todd Maxwell: Great, thank you. Can -- so to start with, can you tell us why the Waynesboro P.D. decide to implement body-worn cameras?

Michael Wilhelm: Sure. We actually debated that for, you know, quite some time. I mean, we -- when I started with Waynesboro back in 1995, that's one of the main reason I came to this agency was because we have such a great relationship with our community. So, you know, it would have been easy for us to wait to move forward because we've always have such a cooperative and trusting relationship with our community.

In my opinion, when my staff and I started looking at this, it wasn't a matter of trying to, you know, increase the trust with the community because we already had it. But it was more of looking to our -- increase our efficiency and our transparency with the community which -- it was an easy transition for us to implement body-worn cameras.

Todd Maxwell: So you mentioned the community. Can you explain your community outreach process specifically around your BWC policy formation and the outreach?

Michael Wilhelm: Sure. We've got, you know, we're a small -- relatively small agency for this area and we've got a limited amount of resources. So, we wanted to -- with our community reach -- outreach program we wanted to reach the largest number of citizens we could and community leaders in one fell swoop. So, well actually one of my staff members suggested, well why don't we do a presentation at our city council meeting. And we have a monthly city council meeting where all the city leaders will attend, we usually have three or four media outlets there, several community members as well and it's also televised to other citizens in Waynesboro.

So, we thought that was a pretty good platform to do a short presentation, covering what exactly a body-worn camera was. We covered -- basically the highlights of our policy but we didn't go line by line explaining every detail.

We gave the citizens and our community leaders some situational examples of, you know, when the camera should be activated and when it was discretionary to be activated. And then we kind of opened it up for questions with the council members and the public.

And that serves us very well. We've got some follow-up from citizens and community members after that. So, what we did after that was we -- the community -- some of our community organizations asked us to come and speak, you know, like churches and civic groups, and stuff like that. So, we've prepared basically a small presentation to go out and did the same thing we did at the city council meeting to the individual community groups.

In addition to that, you know, we've got a Facebook page, did a news release, and -- we actually just did another news release a couple of weeks ago where we actually upgraded our -- the body cameras that we had to the H.D. models that Taser offers. So, you know, it's just a matter of, we wanted that could keep the community engaged from the get-go, that way that we buy in from them.

We also included a couple of our officers in some of these presentations just to show that, you know, these officers -- we have buy in them from the ground up. I mean, it wasn't just the administration pushing, pushing this initiative, it was the officers like, "Oh yes, this is a really good idea, I think we should get -- should implement it." And, you know, we just have to buy in from everywhere. So it was really easy for us.

Todd Maxwell: Did any of those meetings result any policy questions or policy changes?

Michael Wilhelm: We did have some questions. Again, we kind of kept the generic with when we would activate it and when we wouldn't activate it. A lot of the questions we got came from the media. They were wondering if we, you know, we're going to -- we had questions ranging from "Well, are you going to provide us a video if we ask for it? Are you going to have a Web site setup to where we can view all these videos?" Just, you know, kind of filling out where we're going with out policy and our procedures on body-worn cameras.

We were very upfront with them. We told the media and the citizens that, you know, it was our goal to protect the privacy of the citizens. So, only in very limited situations would we, you know, would there be an opportunity where we would release a body-worn camera video.

Todd Maxwell: Sounds good. I know one of the big topics we've been hit with lately has been around whether an officer has the right to review a video before writing a report. Have you guys debated that topic at your agency?

Michael Wilhelm: Yes. We had that in there from the get-go. We do allow officers to review their body-worn camera video before writing a report. What we ran into when we first implemented the program -- and this is -- was kind of one of our stumbling blocks was that we had the system set up to where all the officers should -- could go in and review everybody's body-worn cameras. So we -- we basically locked it down because we, you know, we didn't want everybody Monday morning quarterbacking what one officer did versus what another did.

So, we locked it all down and now the officers can only review their own videos. I can't go in and review -- well, administrative -- administrators of course can go and review everybody's but the individual officers on the street can only go in and review their videos.

Todd Maxwell: Great. Thank you. So, moving on to selecting a vendor, what do you think was your biggest obstacle when meeting with vendors and choosing the right solution for your department?

Michael Wilhelm: Sticker shock. We looked at the -- a variety of different vendors. We also looked at, you know, the storage capacity and whether our I.T. could, you know, have their own server here and manage that. You know, it was a -- it was definitely sticker shock for us. We're kind of fortunate that all of our cameras were purchased using grant funding.

In Virginia we had a big settlement back in 2013 with Abbott labs and they basically divvied up all that money to law enforcement agencies in Virginia. So we applied for that and got a good chunk of money there and then of course our upgrades and everything came with the Bureau of Justice Assistance grant.

So, you know, we didn't really have the big cost of the cameras and the docking stations and everything. And we even managed to move some of that money that we got from the grant opportunities to our first year of cloud storage that way the (bin) counters in our city government wouldn't, you know, face the same sticker shock that we did when we started looking at what this program was going to cost.

So I mean it was relatively easy for us because we did, you know, get the two grants that paid for all of the hardware and the cameras themselves. The cloud storage piece of it, that's, you know, the cost of doing business these days.

Todd Maxwell: Right. Well -- so you mentioned you're doing an I.T. survey as part of it and then you went on to cloud storage. Can you tell our listeners why your agency decided to go cloud versus on premise?

Michael Wilhelm: Sure. We -- when we were looking at the vendors, we did a lot of comparisons and got our I.T. folks involved and basically told them what we were looking at. And at that time when we first started looking at body worn cameras back in 2011, we have a city I.T. department and they would kind of farm out their technicians to us to use whenever we needed them. Now granted there's, you know, six I.T. people for a city with about 400 employees. You kind of do the math on that and, you know, when needed could be two or three days later.

So, when we looked at the cloud storage, I mean it provided a solution that was -- it was scaled to fit our needs as a department. You know, with the limited I.T. resources, we also pushed because we knew we're going to need

somebody on a more dedicated level and we were able to get our city to actually fund a full-time I.T. person here in the police department.

So that made it even easier. By the time we got our body worn program up and running, we already had that I.T. person in place. And any obstacles that we could have encountered, he, you know, took care of that for us because he was here with us all the time.

You know, the only downside for us doing the cloud storage is the cost. And then of course, you know, accessing the cloud storage solution from the cars, you got to have a good reliable internet connection. That's kind of hit and miss in our neck of the woods. We got the Blue Ridge Parkway and Skyline Drive right here so we've got a lot of mountain regions right in our area. I think we've worked through most of those and it really hasn't been an issue for us other than the cost with the cloud storage.

Todd Maxwell: Great. Thank you for that. So have you seen any impact since you've implanted the BWCs on your police department or the local community?

Michael Wilhelm: Everything we've gauged from our community involvement has been positive. It was kind of funny when we started, you know, discussing this with our community members. They're like, do you really need them, because we've always had that trust and that relationship with our community.

My answer to that was that, you know, it's where law enforcement is going as a whole. And it also provides us with another tool to, you know, keep the high-level of accountability for the officer and also, you know, accountability for the citizens. If you know you're being recorded, you've got that kind of sense of awareness and, you know, people tend to follow the rules when they know they're being watched or being recorded. So, it's kind of a two-fold win-win for both of us.

Todd Maxwell: So do you announce, because you mentioned that, do you announce to the citizens that you guys are wearing or ...

Michael Wilhelm: Yes, it's not required but, you know, a lot of -- when we first rolled them out there were some questions. I think everybody knows in our community that we have them and they're -- where they're worn at. I mean if you're talking to the officer and looking at their face, the body-worn camera is, you know, right there on their chest. So, it's kind of hard not see it.

If asked, we of course explain it to them and inform them that they are recording. But with Virginia, you know, it's a one-party state. So we're not required by law. Just more of a common courtesy if they asked, we're going to tell them and explain how the system works to them.

Todd Maxwell: Right. And last question on that topic.

Do you happen to do any type of supervisory view for training purposes on officers?

Michael Wilhelm: We do. Each of the supervisors on the shift and in like the detective's division, special operation division, they are required to do a minimum of -- between 5 and 10, just kind of like, we call them random checks on officers, mainly to make sure they're using the cameras when they're supposed to be, which our policy kind of dictates it's -- when you're in an enforcement capacity.

So, I'm like sitting around the police department talking to other officers or anything, you're not required to use it then. But if you're out, you know, pulling somebody over for speeding or responding to a call for service we like to have the officers turn the cameras on and so the supervisors -- they'll go back once a month and, you know, spot check 5 to 10 situations or reports where the officer should have had the camera on and hold the officer accountable for that.

The other thing we kind of did and this was a shift -- I don't know, probably about a year into it, is we actually added a block on our crime incident reports that basically, it's just a check box thing, body camera activated, body camera not activated. And that's a mandatory field. So, when you go to submit your

report, it won't submit unless that box is checked or not checked. So, it makes it easier for the supervisors to spot check those reports because they can actually run a report and see, OK, well officer A has 12 -- body camera was not activated checks on his reports for this month. Let me go in and review this. And it just ...

Todd Maxwell: Right.

Michael Wilhelm: …made the process a lot easier.

Todd Maxwell: So, if you -- I was asked this question not too long ago at a regional meeting with lots of chiefs that we're looking to implement. And one of the questions they asked that I couldn't quite answer and maybe you can provide some insight was how you handled discipline around an officer that is -- or a group of officers that don't use a technology or consistently use it because it's a fine line and you don't want to point out that issue but how did you guys address that, if you're willing to speak on that.

Michael Wilhelm: Yes. We were -- we're actually kind of lucky. We had tremendous buy in from all our officers. So what we found when we first implemented the program was that when the officers weren't hitting the camera is because they forgot. So, what we did is we went back and did a refresher training, about six months into the program. And that was kind of the reminder for the officers to make sure that they were activating the camera.

Did the same thing with the supervisors because we had -- you know, a couple of them, they were like I forgot to you know do my random check this month. So again we -- a year in to the program we had another refresher training with the supervisors and just kind of reminded them that, you know, this is important, we need to be doing these checks.

Since those -- you know, that time period of doing the refresher training which were basically just briefing trainings with each of the shift. We've had very few instances where the officers have not activated the camera when they should have. So, it worked out well for us to provide that refresher training

which also keyed them in, these are when I need to active it and these are when I need to check the -- check and make sure everybody's using it.

Todd Maxwell: OK. So you guys build in disciplinary rules if they -- like a warning system and then a write up or something like that because that's...

Michael Wilhelm: Yes. We didn't do that. We thought about doing that but, you know, we had such good compliance with it. It really wasn't necessary. So that was fortunate for us.

Todd Maxwell: Understood. Thank you. So, finally, what advice would you give to other similarly-sized agencies that are looking to implement body-worn cameras?

Michael Wilhelm: Start slow. Basically set clear goals and expectations for your program and do your homework. Once you start studying your department program goals, immediately start working on your policy. And luckily there are just so many policies out there, you've got the Bureau of Justice Assistance toolkit, the podcast, the Webinars, you've got all the agencies in your state that now have -- that are using these tools and they have their policies. There's just such a wealth of valuable information out there.

What I tell everybody is take their time, do your research on (helping) at our program was, you know, all right, are patrol officers going to be the primary ones using it, absolutely. But what about the detectives, what about the school resource officers? Get input from all of them.

Also, you know, solicit input from the community. I mean if you don't have that relationship where you can go out and tell the -- or engage with the community and say "Hey, this is what we're looking at implementing and get feedback" then, you know, a body-worn camera might not help build that relationship. You got to have that before you start doing this stuff.

The other thing we did is we hit the ancillary agencies. Our commonwealth attorney, our victim witness, the defense attorneys, the judges, that was kind

of a big hurdle for them. You know, what are they going to allow in the court, what do they want to see, what don't they want to see? Get input from them.

And also, you know set realistic goals. You don't want to -- you want to be purposeful and take their time and not get up in the -- caught up in the whole, what we call the process of, you know, trying to roll them as quickly, roll body-worn cameras out as quickly as you can. You want to make sure that you implement a program that works for your agency and your community. So, what works for Waynesboro, I mean, that might not work for, you know, San Diego or Washington D.C. You've got to be kind of purposeful and get input from everybody within your community and your organization.

Todd Maxwell: Thank you, that's a sound advice. And I'd like to thank you for speaking with us today, Chief Wilhelm.

Michael Wilhelm: Well thank you for having me on. I'm glad I can -- I hope I can help out any other agencies that are looking to implement these types of programs.

Todd Maxwell: Thank you. We encourage law enforcement justice public safety leaders whose agencies are interested in learning more about the implementation of body-worn cameras to visit the body-worn camera toolkit at www.bja.gov/bwc.

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

Lastly all these resources and especially the body-worn camera toolkit and podcast series 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 home page. This is Todd Maxwell of BJA Body-Worn Camera team signing off.

Thank you to our listeners for joining us.

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