

Body Worn Camera Training and Technical Assistance Laredo Independent School District Police Department

Todd Maxwell: Hello again, listeners, this is Todd Maxwell, member of the Bureau of Justice Assistance Body-Worn Camera Team. And today, I'm speaking with Chief (Robert) Villarreal and Training Officer Eric Villarreal, from the Laredo Independent School District.

Chief of Police Roberto Villarreal has 25 years in law enforcement experience, 21 years of school district police experience, and four degrees in law enforcement and public administration. And he will be joining us on this podcast, shortly.

Training Officer Eric Villarreal has 10 years law enforcement experience. He's a former Chief of Police of (El Cenizo) and Rio Bravo, former Army National Guard for eight years of service, former private investigator and he also has his degree in criminal justice and two years with the Laredo ISD Police Department. Thank you for speaking with me today.

(Eric Villarreal): Thank you.

Todd Maxwell: What led the Laredo department to decide to implement by the cameras? It's sort of a unique. Can you just give us a background of what Laredo ISD Police Department does and how they handle (before)...

(Eric Villarreal): Well, for the Laredo ISD Police Department, it's pretty much the same enforcement that a local police department has. The only difference is we're involved in a school setting, which means we have other investigations that deal with students, staff, or any sort of investigation that pertains to the criminal element. That's what we do have. The only difference from either/or is, too, because we're involved in a school setting, (that's for sure).

Todd Maxwell: OK, great. And, how many officers do you guys have in your department?

(Eric Villarreal): Right now, we do have an estimate of at least 36 (warrant) police officers.

Todd Maxwell: OK, great. And so, what led the Laredo ISD department to implement body-worn cameras?

(Eric Villarreal): Well, for our Police Department and everything, we wanted to be more transparent with the public. (Our) progression (with) is trying to get much better. At the same time, we understand that later on in the future, all any kind of law enforcement will be implementing body cameras.

So at that space, we want to have our Police Department be fully prepared for this. Again, it is a long process. Everything has to be (jotted) down and all that, and for our school district, as per Laredo — for Laredo ISD — and the other ISD's that are here, we're the only one that's pretty much projecting to deploy body cameras in the school setting.

What's more important out of all this, is that we are catching an eye to other agencies, nationwide, because when we applied for the grant, we also did notice we're the only ISD in the nation that qualified for the grant. So, that's kind of a big step, it is an honor at the same time, but this is where we — as our Police Department — have to do that extra legwork, so we had everything precise.

Todd Maxwell: So, if you were advising another agency that is implementing the school district, what would you say your biggest challenge is to implementing a BWC program will, or are, going to be?

(Eric Villarreal): The biggest challenges right now, that we are going through — it was a long process — is our actual policy manual. (The) policy manual has to do a lot with the legalities of what we're actually going to be doing, since we are in a school setting, there have to have a lot of involvement with privacy issues dealing with students and the staff, and everything else.

It's very, very important that a police department has to have an extensive amount of research dealing with the implementation of their policy manual.

Todd Maxwell: OK. Well, great. And so, can you...

Male: Actually...

Todd Maxwell: ...sort of explain your outreach process, especially around the BWC policy (formation).

Male: Of course. We actually did our policy with the outreach. We did communicate with parent involvement. We did have that. We did outreach to the district and the County attorney's office, for documentation (themes) with legal issues with presenting audio and video recordings pertaining to a school setting.

We did get a lot of positive feedback, but at the same time we have to have an understanding that once we are actually deploying body-worn cameras, we have to do an extensive amount of training with our police officers.

Todd Maxwell: And, did you guys have to do any type of (in determination), sharing or gathering — or, outreach — with other law enforcement agencies that might come in for mutual aid, or anything?

Male: Yes, we actually had to communicate with other agencies, especially the - - we had a university here in Laredo - - we did communicate with them. We tried to get their feedback, and to find out what amount of resources do they have for pertaining to body cameras, how are they actually deployed? How has it been working with their officers dealing with criminal and civil suits? - - and all of that nature. We did also communicate, again, with the District Attorney's Office, (Allen County) attorney's office, specifying that we are going to have police officers deploying body cameras, on person for safety.

So with other local agencies that we have here, they do have what is called "in-dash cameras," but they don't have an actual physical, body camera on their person. So, that's kind of an extra step, because at the same time there's a different amount of recording when you have it in a dash cam than for an officer making an interview with whoever it is involved in that case.

Todd Maxwell: Great. You mentioned that some of the biggest challenges for you guys was the policy development. Was there any particular policy point that was difficult, or was this whole process difficult?

And, the reason I ask is because some of the biggest issues that we see around body cams is, has been releasing the video and then, of course, the officer's right to review the video before writing a report. So, just wanted to get your perspective on some of those, and what your biggest challenges were, in the policy?

Male: Our biggest challenges right now is that what we're doing right now, we're actually in our "Phase Two Process." What I explain what the Phase Two is that, our Phase One started off to actually do the implementation and the clearance for an actual policy manual. Once that's been cleared off, we're already projecting now this Phase Two.

Phase Two, we have to find out what amount, what camera can be suitable for our needs in the school setting. That would be an introduction of security encryption if the officer is able to actually review the video, just at a review level and that's it. If it's able to actually acknowledge that if there's any tampering with evidence with the actual equipment, it does give a red flag to the administrator, which is myself.

Everything is - - well, our main thing is being with the vendors is our security encryptions (beginning) with the video evidence, and then storage. That's one of the main things that we are actually researching right now, it's the storage. Where can we actually have this equipment stored? Either we're going to have it internal, or are we going to go in a Cloud setting?

Todd Maxwell: OK. And, so are you guys leaning one way or the other?

Male: Actually, right now, we're doing the research on both, sir. We actually have great communication with our IT department. They are assisting us with well with this deployment of body cameras. The reason we get them involved, is

because they have a more set set of understandings to how technology works, dealing with the software and the storage. So, if we get them involved, it'll give us a better answer of how (will we) be suitable to dealing with the storage and evidence.

Todd Maxwell: Got you. So, it sounds like your biggest considerations (around) vendors and storage are still being worked out for storage, but for vendors it's sort of encryption and the ability to review. Is that correct?

Male: Yes, sir. The reason is for the encryptions, that's one of the main things. There is a couple of other things there, if I may add, that we're looking in our police department.

One of them was the redaction, dealing with any person that if they're going to release for open records — especially dealing with the media — that they want a request for open records information pertaining to a case, or any involvement of the officer, we do have to have the access of redaction at the same time. Because, we have to have the understanding that the person being involved in that case has to have some sort of a privacy with them, as well.

That, and we need to have an involvement of GPS mapping, which is giving us the exact coordinates (of) where was the officer located. It's very crucial to our department that we have that information, because we need to know exactly where our police officer was, once his body camera was actually deployed.

And, at the same time it gathers us more solid evidence, so when we proceed into court we can actually give them one, the exact location of where it happened, and we have the evidence to prove it, with this software. And at the same time it kind of gives you an exact location, so when we're actually going to present it in court, the jury can understand where the officer was exactly located.

Todd Maxwell: How big is your coverage area?

Male: Our coverage area, it does (expand)...

(Off Mic) (Inaudible).

Male: ...It's 13 miles is our actual coverage of our area, sir.

Todd Maxwell: OK.

(Multiple Speakers)

Todd Maxwell: OK...

Male: ...because we have a (used to measure)...

Todd Maxwell: ...(I just wondered)...

Male: ...31 schools.

Todd Maxwell: OK, great. That's what I was trying to get to, so our listeners have an idea of when you mentioned the GPS and they're talking about schools, they might have a better way to visualize it, if they knew the sizes and how many schools.

So, that's great. So, are there any big differences in youth cases for school police, versus a municipal style police department?

Male: Absolutely, because the thing about it is that being an officer from a school setting, you see firsthand what the actual officer — oh, the student — is going through. Reason being that you get some information dealing with other staff members that evaluate the child, or possibly the child is actually turned in to adult.

You actually have some sort of a background what you're dealing with, then. Compared to being outside in the local municipality that the officer is just in the, a responding officer, which means he gets there, he has very minimal information pertaining to that child.

Us, with the school setting, we do develop a partnership with the actual students, so we do understand (what) they're coming from, compared to an officer that's out in the local level, and just responding to an actual call. So, our officers have a firsthand more of an experience and exposure with the actual student.

Todd Maxwell: That brings up a good point, and since you are working with a lot of students, have you estimated any redaction costs for any types of releases you might have to do, since most of your individuals on video would probably be under age?

Male: Well, that's a very good question. To give you that solid answer, our IT department is not here, but if there is any cost issues or anything like that, I will get you the solid answer later on in the next (meeting).

But, as for sure, for us and everything, dealing with the software, hopefully we'll find out the exact costs (dealing) with redaction, and dealing with what are the costs that are going to be dealing with the media (read). Or, if pertaining to an actual case, that a person being involved wants to have actual evidence to find out they are involvement with (that thing).

Todd Maxwell: Great, well, it sounds like you guys will be a nice model for other agencies that are looking at implementing body-worn cameras. And so, to close out with that, what advice would you give to other school districts or agencies that are looking to implement body-worn cameras?

Male: The main thing that I can (actually) give for our department and everything is, "take your time." You have to be very patient with everything else. Starting with your policy, if you're going to advocate for other departments and everything else, I highly recommend do your extensive research.

Get other people involved — other agencies — that have deployed body cameras, whether they're in the school setting or in a local municipality, try to understand how the process works (dealing) with audio visual recordings in

the public environment, and all that. But, before any thing, just take your time (about) what you're doing.

Don't go in a rush and everything, because what you need to do with that, in this process, that you're - if you're transitioning from a department that's never had any body-worn cameras to having it now, if you're going to need time for that. Because training is going to be involved in all that, legal aspects have to be educated to the officers.

And if you are in the school setting, what the administrators — and what I explained by "administrators" are your principals, your assistant principals — what are the legal rights of dealing with an audiovisual recording pertaining to certain cases. They have to be fully aware of that, as well.

Because, since an officer for an ISD is deploying body cameras within a school setting, I would highly recommend for the police agency to have a good rapport with - - whether it be the superintendent, or the IT department in that location, to find out exactly what they need to do, and what legal aspects are they going to go through on that.

Todd Maxwell: Great, and thank you for all those points. I really appreciate you taking the time to speak with us today. You will be our first school district law enforcement on the podcast series. So, again, thank you for joining us today.

Roberto Villarreal: All right.

Todd Maxwell: 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 The Body-Worn Camera Toolkit, at www.dj.gov/bwc. This toolkit offers a variety of resources that agencies can use to help with the adoption and use for community involvement, policy development, data collection, officer training and educational programs.

We also encourage listeners to share and promote these resources with your colleagues and staff. Lastly, all these resources in The Body-Worn Camera

Toolkit have been designed as your resources. So, please submit your ideas and your content to the BWC support link at the bottom of the homepage.

This is Todd Maxwell, Bureau of Justice Assistance Body-Worn Camera Team, signing off, and thank you for joining us today.

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