

Body Worn Camera Training and Technical Assistance
William Knott- Dinwiddie, VA Police Department

Todd Maxwell: Hello, again, listeners. This is Todd Maxwell, a member of the Bureau of Justice Assistance, Body-Worn Camera team. And, today, I'm speaking with Major William Knott of Dinwiddie County Sheriff's Office, Dinwiddie, Virginia.

Major Knott is a lifelong resident of Dinwiddie County, Virginia. He was — has been with the Dinwiddie County Sheriff's Office for over 27 years and has worked in all divisions of the sheriff's office including corrections, patrol, investigations; being promoted from those positions to command staff, first, as a captain then as a major. He has been the major and deputy chief for seven years now. Major Knott holds a Master's Degree from Liberty University in Criminal Justice with Concentration in Public Administration. Thank you, Major, for speaking with us today.

William Knott: Thank you for having me on.

Todd Maxwell: Let's I guess start. What led the Sheriff's Department to decide to implement body-worn cameras?

William Knott: Well, we had a specific need for a body-worn camera. We had never used one before. With that, we conferred with a neighboring jurisdiction that had implemented the body-worn camera program. We got some ideas on how their program had worked. We got a copy of their policies. And we put this one camera into place kind of two-fold. One to deal with this issue that we had that we wanted to deal with. And then, secondly, to give the body-worn camera a try to see how it — how it work for us here in Dinwiddie County.

We had a number of — had some interest from a number of deputies in our department of getting body-worn cameras. Some of these deputies have gone out and purchased their own. They — and we had no policies or anything in place. So, when this grant funding became available, we saw a need of — that we wanted to start an official body-worn camera program with the Sheriff's Office. So, the timing was right for us to try to get in on that grant funding. And, fortunately enough, we were awarded it.

Todd Maxwell: Great. So, you had — some officers had bought cameras on their own without a policy. That has been an interesting aspect for a lot of our smaller and more rural agencies where agencies have gone and seen officers doing that. And then they've decided that they needed a department-wide policy just to — for their own protection and for their officer's protection. Is that sort of how it evolved with you?

William Knott: That's exactly how it evolved for us. You know, when you work in a rural jurisdiction, a small jurisdiction, the — everybody knows the sheriff and most people have his phone number. And he makes himself very available to the citizens. And, when they — you know, they get a call or he gets a call from most citizens saying whatever — if it was a complaint or a compliment, whatever it is — he comes back to the deputy with it.

The deputies kind of felt they needed that as a backup to be able to say, "OK. This is what I — what I did, how I did it." And it was — again, without a place, it was kind of problem. We didn't know how — we just need to address it and try to put something more official in place.

Todd Maxwell: Great. Well, it sounds like the officers sort of drove the need with your department initially. And then everyone sort of adapted the program and moved forward. So, that's a sort of great to see. We've seen that in a couple of other agencies. And we've talked to a lot of police departments but not a whole lot of sheriff's departments on these podcast series. So, can you sort of tell us some of the biggest challenges to implementing a body-worn camera for a sheriff's department in maybe a rural area?

William Knott: Well, you know, there's a lot of the same issues that I've seen with my experiences implementing this that we ran — that police departments and sheriff's offices across the country have seen. I attended the national meeting last spring when we got the grant funding that was held up in Olive, Virginia. And I had the opportunity to table with law enforcement professionals from across the nation both large and small agencies, police departments, sheriff offices alike.

And the first thing I saw was that no matter the size of department or what type of agency it was that a lot of the same problems and concerns we're facing all these. And, so, I didn't feel too bad, going into or coming away from that meeting, that we were kind of on the same page and, actually, maybe ahead of some of these other agencies. But the one that we've ran into here and it's — I guess would be true with most sheriff's offices. We are the law enforcement for the county. There are — there are no other police departments in the — in our jurisdiction.

We're a full-service sheriff's office across the board. And the sheriff is an elected official, a constitutional officer here in Virginia. And he is not hired by a city council or a board of supervisors. He is elected by the citizens and feels very accountable to them, and wants to be open, being very transparent to the citizens. He has an open-door policy. He makes — I mean he actually puts his cellphone number out to the public. Anybody can pick up the phone and call him day or night.

So, this just seemed to be another step in that transparency to implementing a body-worn camera program, and making the citizens a part of this. Again, still with developing a policy and all of that, we try to take into consideration the sheriff's position as sheriff and being accountable to the citizens, and being elected by the citizens to make this — make them a part of the process, and make them feel like that they had a hand in the policy procedure in implementing this body-worn camera program.

Todd Maxwell: So, can you elaborate sort of — you started talking about the getting the community's input to the policy process. But can you sort of talk about any policy input or collaboration you had with the prosecutors who are the county or any other — you mentioned you be — your agency, the sheriff's office, being the only law enforcement in the district. So, there might not have been other PDs that you had to interact with. But any type of collaboration with other agencies and prosecutors and the community to sort of walk us through the outreach process you did.

William Knott: Right. And it's starting out with this — with this project. When we first got this one camera before we'd even got the grant funding, we had reached out to

a neighboring jurisdiction. They were close to us. We worked with them on a number of different projects. We're a member of several taskforce with them and this type of thing. And, so, we had reached out to them and gotten a copy of their policy to start with. That was kind of the basis that we used to look at the — where to start with that.

We talked to them about some of the obstacles that they had had to cross in implementing their policy. And we felt comfortable in talking to them. We also went out to — with BJA and other Department of Justice resources. We went out to other agencies similar in size looking at their policies. We did contact the — our prosecutors of county's sheriff's office and the county attorney for their — and sought their guidance in the development of the policy.

First of all, with the prosecutor's office, "Hi. This was a video and this was going to be used by the prosecutor's office." What were they looking for? How were they going to use it? What — you know, as far as storage of it and how long we would store this video with things that we may need to use? We consulted with them. And they had a lot of input into that.

We also talked to the county attorney who — and talked to him about any liability issues that we needed to consider. With this being a new venture, there were a number of things that we did not consider putting into the policy. And we realized later on after we got involved in this that we had to incorporate more things. It was just a lot more things that we just — had not considered at all with the initial policy that we drew up.

With having it approved and going through the scorecard with the policy and after submitting it three or four times, we had that — we had the policy approved. And, so, then we were — worked off of that to get the — get the citizens of Dinwiddie County involved. We posted a copy of the — of the policy on our county's website. We released it. We made some media releases with two local papers — newspapers that we did some releases with. They did stories on our program in the body-worn cameras in general and how we were going to be using them.

We scheduled a town hall meeting. We made that open to the public. We promoted that. We especially got involved with the faith-base — faith-based organizations here in Dinwiddie County. They're very strong group. They have a lot of pull in the county. And, so, we wanted to get them involved specifically. And we did.

We went to the civic clubs, local neighborhood watch groups. When we had this town hall meeting, we had a really good turnout. There's a lot of interaction between the citizens who showed up. And they had a lot of good questions. We tried to — you know, when we walked away from that, I think everybody felt good about the program. I think the citizens felt comfortable how it was going to be used, and that they were comfortable with that.

We did have a separate meeting with the Dinwiddie County Chapter of the NWACP and kind of provided — we provided them copies of the policy, made sure they understood how it was going to be used, and answered their questions. And I think they felt — felt good about that. At the sheriff's office, we were very fortunate that, here in Dinwiddie County, we have a lot of support. There's a lot of local support for law enforcement. The county — the citizens are very supportive of us to start with.

So, adding this and adding that level — another level of transparency to the citizens I think just increased their support of the sheriff's office. And we have really felt good about how this has all worked out for us. We did actually some demo videos once we got our cameras and everything. We did some demo videos and some training videos that we actually showed this is how it's going to be — these cameras are going to be used on a traffic stop or with the interactions with the public. And we can go in and we can redact out people who were innocent bystanders out of it.

And I think the citizens appreciated that part of it as well. You know, we've tried to listen to the citizens and make them feel comfortable with it. And I feel that we've been successful with it. As the program has gone along, we've gotten nothing but positive feedback from the citizens of the county.

Todd Maxwell: Great. Thank you. It's very extensive outreach. I appreciate that. So, as a — as a sheriff's department and being a major law enforcement in the whole county, you mentioned having a county attorney and some other prosecutors who reached out with, and possibly having some cities where they might have municipalities, and then plus you run the jail, how — were there any differences in used cases for you guys — for your department — your sheriff's office versus other PDs that you came in contact with?

William Knott: Well, I think in our — in our department, we got these cameras out first of all to patrol one and the ones who were doing law enforcement action, you know, within the — within the county and made sure that they have it. And the policy is that you use these cameras activated with any citizen contacts or any contacts that you go on, and that we found a storage solution that worked well for us that we can pretty much have unlimited amount of storage available to us.

So, we told them to use it. Activate it every time. I mean, if it's something that's not a big deal, it would — we have — it's set up with different parameters of when these will be, you know, dropped off or when — you know, how long we will retain the video. And we encouraged all the guys to use it.

We also have a pretty aggressive selective enforcement traffic program where guys can come in on their off time and work selective enforcement — traffic enforcement in the county. We make sure that not all of the people — all the deputies would do that or in patrols. Some are in investigations. Actually, some in the command staff get out and still do traffic enforcement. So, we provided them with the body cameras as well.

We don't have — our — we are part of a regional jail system. The jail is no longer here at the sheriff's office or in the county. It's in the adjoining county. So, we didn't have that to deal with as far as a body camera in a jail setting. One of the unique places that we have here in the county is the county has a state mental health facility here in the county. It's actually the largest one in the State of Virginia. And we are currently doing all of the enforcement there on the campus.

And, so, that was one thing that came up as how we were going to use that in that type of environment. And that took a little give and take on both — on both party sides. When you get into a hospital type environment or mental health facility type environment, you know, when — when to use these cameras and when not to use them. And, so, we've addressed that in the policy. And I think that everybody at the hospital is good at where we're at on that as well as our guys.

Todd Maxwell: Thank you. You can tell it's been a while since I had been to Dinwiddie because the last time the sheriff's — the sheriff's office had the jail right there on the — on the main campus.

William Knott: We did. We've been — we have been — we've been added out of the jail business for about five years now. There's a regional jail down in Brunswick County just the county side.

Todd Maxwell: OK. Great. So, you don't have any other city or municipalities that you have to report to; just the county administration.

William Knott: Nope. Just the county.

Todd Maxwell: OK. So, you mentioned earlier about, you know, the unlimited storage. Can you tell us what your agency's biggest consideration when you were looking at vendors and storage? And what led you to choose the particular storage option you went with?

William Knott: Well, when we got this — when we were awarded the grant, the flood gates kind of opened and vendors were kind of coming out of the woodwork. Everybody seemed to have the latest, greatest, and wanting us to try and try that. And we did. We tested a number of camera options. And we put them out with some of the guys. "Here try to see what you think. How is it — you know, how — was it mounted on uniform? How does this — you know, is it comfortable? Is it, you know, bulky? Is it, you know" — and we had a little bit of everything.

And we got some good feedback from our guys who were testing them in this. But the bottom — the bottom line, as it all played out, was we looked at the reputation of the company in the field of the body-worn cameras. Is this something that they had been doing and or is this something that they — where this — you know, the publicity of the grant funding came available, is this something that they just jumped up and put something together at the last minute to try to get their share of the pie.

And we looked that, the reputation, the length of time of the business, the technical support, the price point, the — their compatibility with the different storage solutions. We looked at in-house storage versus a cloud-base storage. We looked at all those options and the cost associated with that. We have a — the county has their own in-house IT department, and we had some lengthy conversations with them. And they were able to offer up a solution as to what and what that would cost the county, and then the backup and the redundancy of it so that, you know, there was no chance of losing this.

We looked at the ruggedness. We looked at the word of mouth. We looked at what other agencies were using and put all that together to finally make a decision as to the vendor. We went with for the cameras as well as the storage of the video.

Todd Maxwell: OK. Great. And, so, you guys chose to house in on-premise for your videos.

William Knott: No. We actually — we actually —

Todd Maxwell: OK.

William Knott: use a cloud-based solution.

Todd Maxwell: OK. Great. Great. And then you're sharing electronically with the county prosecutor.

William Knott: Yes. Yes.

Todd Maxwell: OK.

William Knott: We're working very closely with them. And they — they have access to pretty much — we've — and it's a small prosecutor's office. It's a small sheriff's office. And I think that's one unique part about a smaller agency. It's, you know, they trust us. We trust them. And, so, we give them pretty much full access to all of our videos. And there has not been a problem with that up to this point. And I don't expect there to be a problem.

Todd Maxwell: OK.

William Knott: We worked very well together.

Todd Maxwell: OK. Great. Final question, what advice would you give to other sheriff's offices or department that are looking to implement body-worn cameras?

William Knott: The biggest thing is there's no need to recreate the wheel. It's the best advice that I can give. Talk to other agencies that — the agencies that have been through the process. Talk to agencies like SAS. When you get into larger agencies, you know, they've got — they have some hurdles and some things to cross that really we don't. And, so, you know, talk to agencies that are like SAS.

Share copies of — get copies of policies. Incorporate what's the best of those and kind of tweak them to your advantage. We got — we got policies from all over, and we got them from large and small agencies alike. And we spent a lot of time going through them and trying to picking — picking them apart and picking what's good for us. And that's what kind of helped us think about some things outside of the box that we hadn't thought about. "Well, this is a good point here. This is something that we may come across that we should — we should think about."

And, so, you know, no need to replay a ground that's already been played. Take advantage of your agencies. Everybody seemed to be very willing for us to provide us with copies of their policies. They gave us permission to use whatever we wanted to use. And we are the same way. I would encourage any listeners who would like to contact us. We'll be more than happy to share

you any of our experiences with them, share our policy with them, and kind of some other things. If we can make their job easier, we want to.

Todd Maxwell: That's great advice. Thank you, Major Knott, for participating today and sharing your insight in these topics.

William Knott: Happy to do it.

Todd Maxwell: We encourage law enforcement justice, public safety leaders, and agencies that are interested 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 to help with the adaption 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 and staff. And, lastly, all these resources especially the body-worn camera toolkit have been signed as national resource. Your resource. So, please submit your ideas for new content to the BWC support link at the bottom of the homepage.

This is Todd Maxwell, the Bureau of Justice Assistance, Body-worn Camera Team, signing off. Thank you again to our listeners for joining us.

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