



August 28, 2015

Frederic N. Smalkin
Chair, Commission Regarding the Implementation and
Use of Body Cameras by Law Enforcement Officers

Dear Chairman Smalkin,

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) supports the ability for local law enforcement to equip their officers with body cameras and other beneficial technologies. Counties appreciate the efforts of the Commission Regarding the Implementation and Use of Body Cameras by Law Enforcement Officers (Commission) to help guide the Maryland Police Training Commission (MPTC) regarding the best practices for use of body cameras by law enforcement officers in the state. As the Commission seeks input from interested stakeholders, MACo welcomes the opportunity to provide the following feedback on best practices that will balance statewide standards against local management.

Body cameras have the potential to aid police and community relations, foster trust, increase transparency, and ensure accountability. However, body cameras are still an emerging technology and much is being learned about the benefits, drawbacks and limitations of their use as pioneering law enforcement agencies begin to adopt and deploy them.

Several counties across the state, including Baltimore City and Kent and Montgomery Counties, are in the process of piloting body camera programs. These jurisdictions vary in size, budget, services provided, and constituents policed. And while they all operate in best interest of their residents, each has unique conditions that determine what those best interests are. The same can be said for the rest of Maryland's subdivisions.

So while it is important to have clear and consistent policies across the state on the use of body cameras, any statewide requirements should also be balanced to ensure the policies are not too onerous, expensive, or restrictive on county governments and local law enforcement. A local jurisdiction should have flexibility to address the unique needs of its community and no jurisdiction should be precluded from implementing a body camera

program because the standards set are impossible for them to meet. A set of state-imposed rules that proves unreachable would have the opposite effect to that being sought, as it could prevent reasonable use of this technology.

Finally, while the Commission has publicly opined that it does not intend to address laws regarding body camera footage and the Maryland Public Information Act (MPIA), we would stress that public disclosure and access to body camera footage remains an important and pressing issue to address. There are practical, technical and privacy challenges with fielding broad requests and access to potentially hundreds of hours of accumulated body camera footage that would require time-intensive attorney review and redaction where appropriate or required by law. MACo believes that a reasonable balance should be pursued to ensure appropriate public access but responsibly account for the challenges of maintaining privacy and protecting against invasive or abusive requests.

Body cameras have the potential to be a very useful public safety tool. It is in the best interest of all Marylanders to maximize the benefit and utility of body cameras to both law enforcement and the communities they serve. MACo is committed to working with the Commission, MPTC and other stakeholders as the State and local jurisdictions move to embrace body cameras and implement successful programs.

Sincerely,

Natasha Mehu
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Maryland Association of Counties

cc: Commission Regarding the Implementation and Use of Body Cameras by Law
Enforcement
Donald Hogan, GOOCP
Rachel Kesselman, GOCCP