From: Steve Verburg
To: Body-Worn Camera Feasibility Review Committee
Subject: urging recommendation against body-worn cameras
Date: Monday, December 21, 2020 2:44:33 PM

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Members of the Body-Worn Camera Feasibility Review Committee:

Good afternoon,

I'm writing to ask you to recommend against the use of body-worn cameras by Madison police.

Research to date indicates far more factors militating against the technology than for it.

I'll highlight one very important problem. Ever since I moved to Madison in 2000, I've heard about racial disparities in police arrests and citations. As you know, Madison has among the worst records for this in the country. I've heard many promises of remedies, but the problem has worsened.

Body-worn cameras will be yet another factor that further worsens these disparities.

As you have read, body-worn cameras do not provide an objective view of an arrest. They tend to provide a view skewed toward the appearance of wrongdoing by the person shown in the video -- usually not a police officer but a person being arrested. And in fact, BWC usage results in more arrests and citations. That will mean more arrests and citations of the Black people who are being contacted by police out of proportion to their numbers.

No matter what policy a police department puts in place, body-worn cameras are turned on and off by police officers at their discretion. This is doubtless one of the reasons why BWC don't produce more consequences for wrongdoing by police officers, and why they lead to more arrests and convictions for non-police.

It's unfortunate, but that's the way it works. A police officer will always be able to say the camera was inadvertently not turned on or that a glitch led to no recording being preserved.

You might ask whether it might be a good thing to have more arrests and convictions of Black people through the use of BWC technology. You might ask yourself if it isn't true that Black people naturally commit more crimes?

Isn't it true that the racial disparities in citations and arrests in Madison occur because police are doing their jobs to perfection and Black people happen to violate the law more often than white people do? The evidence says "No."

Here is one well-documented example. Marijuana is used by Black people at roughly the same rate and it is by white people. But Madison police make marijuana arrests of Black people twelve times as often as white people on a per capita basis.
https://madison.com/wsj/news/local/crime_and_courts/despite-comparable-use-police-sanctions-for-smokingpot-

fall-far-more-on-blacks/article_ba994656-9cc3-5878-a187-33f5d9a63620.html

As you may remember, in Madison and Dane County the gap between Blacks and whites in the law enforcement system has continued to widen. https://madison.com/ct/news/local/govt-and-politics/sustained-objection-dane-county-da-ismael-ozanne-facescriticism-over-racial-disparities/article_c1ed2a89-df07-5242-92de-d96c89c72669.html

In 2004, Black people made up 6% of Madison's population and were issued 15% of traffic citations. By 2019, Black people were 7% of the population, and they were issued 25% of city traffic citations

Think about it. Every single time you drive your vehicle, how many of your fellow motorists exceed the speed limit? How many of them get pulled over? Of those, how many are cited? A very small fraction, right?

How do the police choose which two or three of the thousands of speeders to pull over? There are probably several factors. But the outcome is Black people are cited far out of proportion to their numbers.

And a longstanding government policy or practice that harms one racial group more than others is a longstanding racist government policy or practice.

How about more serious crimes? U.S. Department of Justice surveys show that only a small fraction of criminal offenses are reported to police, and a fraction of those lead to arrests, and even fewer lead to prosecutions and convictions.

Some of the results in Madison:

In 2004 Blacks made up 6% of the city's population and 29% of arrests. By 2018 it was 43% of arrests.

Black youth represented 49% of all juvenile arrests in 2010. That figure rose to 66% by 2018.

In Dane County in 2010, Blacks made up 44% of inmates locked in the county jail. By 2018, it was 46%.

If you know some nice police officers, as I do, this can be hard to accept. But you don't need to believe all police officers are unconsciously racist to see the way a criminal record grows naturally and gathers momentum. Traffic citations and arrests for minor infractions lead to more of the same because decisions on the subsequent citations, arrests, and prosecutions are based in part on records of the prior contacts with police and courts.

It's easy to forget how this works and for how many years it has been happening in Madison, causing real harm to Black lives far out of proportion to their numbers.

Body-worn cameras lead to more arrests and prosecutions by a system that harms one racial group more than others.

Please don't worsen this problem by recommending the use of body-worn cameras.

This is a technology that I viewed favorably just a few months ago. But reviewing research on the outcomes this technology creates makes clear that it would worsen the mistreatment of Madison residents and worsen racial disparities.

One last thing. I know there is a certain amount of contradictory research on BWC technology. I urge you to take as much time as is needed to carefully weigh the strength and validity of the studies you view as relevant to your decision. Of course, it is tempting to complete your work sooner rather than later. It's more important to get this right.

Thanks for your hard work, and thanks for considering my view.

Sincerely,

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