From: Steve Verburg
To: Body-Worn Camera Feasibility Review Committee
Subject: Opposing body-worn cameras
Date: Monday, January 4, 2021 6:45:47 PM

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Members of the Body-Worn Camera Feasibility Review Committee:

I am writing to again urge you to recommend against the use of body-worn cameras by Madison police and additionally to ask you to recommend that the Common Council adopt a policy to prevent the use of this technology until there are ways to ensure that its use would not cause serious harm.

One other point I didn't make in my previous correspondence concerns the budgetary impact of BWC. In addition to the cost of the technology and storage media, the use of BWC would present major labor costs. Police administrators and city attorneys would need to spend countless hours reviewing BWC footage in response to the inevitable records requests that would be made by members of the public. Police officers and supervisors would spend vast amounts of time reviewing footage, tagging it, and annotating it for review by prosecutors.

The enormity of the labor cost became clear to me over the weekend.

Have you watched a professional football or basketball game in recent years? If you have, you have seen clear and abundant evidence of how much time it takes to properly review a videotaped record.

Existing research certainly understates the amount of time this technology takes to use. A thirty-minute incident and arrest would certainly require at least ten times that long to:
* carefully review all thirty minutes of footage and
* carefully double-check what the footage appears to show.

And AFTER that, the police officer could begin to tag the footage and insert needed time markers and labels -- something NBA and NFL refs don't need to do.

Put a stopwatch to NFL and NBA referees reviewing video of -- not a thirty-minute investigation and arrest but -- just a crucial two or three seconds of a football of basketball play to determine what really happened. One would hope that police would spend at least this much time to ensure that they were interpreting images properly when someone's freedom was at stake.

Of course, referees for professional sports teams have the benefit of images recorded by high-definition cameras following the action from three or four or more angles. The game officials also have the luxury of assistance from remote studios staffed by professionals trained in the use of millions of dollars in video replay equipment. These resources mean they are able to work much more quickly, efficiently and accurately than a single police officer with single tiny camera and viewing equipment purchased within the budget constraints of a local government agency.

The contrast with professional sports replay reviews shed light on other more serious problems

posed by BWC.

The harm that would be caused is easily foreseen.

BWC would only worsen the embarrassing racial disparities the Madison Police Department's practices have been driving. Research shows that BWCs lead to more arrests and prosecutions and that they produce video that distorts perception in a way that obscures police misconduct and makes people being arrested appear to exhibit aggression when they are not being aggressive.

The committee should recommend that BWC not be used until MPD has drastically reduced its racial disparities in arrests, and until the technology no longer distorts perception to make non-police appear to be more threatening and aggressive than they are. Putting BWC in the hands of a department that is unfairly over-policing people of color will only exacerbate this injustice.

The committee should also recommend that BWC not be used until policies and technology are in place that ensure the cameras are always in operation and that the video produced is always available for review by independent oversight entities including the independent police auditor, the community oversight board, other local committees with oversight of the police department, and justice department officials and court officers overseeing any consent orders governing police misconduct. Without such a policy, police officers will have effective control over what is recorded and what is not recorded, and over what is released and what is not. This confers on police officers the power to prevent BWC from providing images exculpatory to non-police individuals while ensuring the use of images likely to be perceived as incriminating. That will be the case as long as the police are able to turn the cameras on and off and able to decide when video produced by cameras may be viewed by others.

Thanks for your hard work on this topic, and thanks for considering what I have presented today and in my previous correspondence.

Sincerely,

Steve Verburg
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District 16
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