From: Gisela Wilson
To: Body-Worn Camera Feasibility Review Committee
Subject: Brief Comment re: Body Cam Policy
Date: Thursday, December 3, 2020 3:34:11 PM

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December 3, 2020

Dear Members of the BODY-WORN CAMERA FEASIBILITY REVIEW COMMITTEE,

I am writing today to briefly indicate my stance on body worn cameras. Unfortunately, I have a priorly scheduled meeting this evening.

I am against Madison incorporating Body Cams into MPD usage at this time. Although many hoped body cams would offer a measure of police accountability, in practise, four factors work against this aim.

First, body camera footage is selective in its perspective. This means officers might be able to justify their behavior based on a perspective that includes only the victim or suspect's response and, importantly, not the stimuli or behavior that elicited that response.

Second, police have qualified immunity both in the courts and in the commonly held views of a majority white public. Until there are adequate legal measures to hold police (and society) accountable, camera footage is waste of time and money. Many judges don't even look at body camera footage until later stages of a trial. Suspects also may be more likely to plead out if told there is film without knowing what that film might show. Innocent suspects pleading out has already been shown to be an issue due to the comparatively high bail amounts set when the suspect is Black.

Third, likely due to the fact that body camera footage is from the officer's perspective, data examining the results of body cameras already in use show that body cam use actually has resulted in an increase in arrests for petty crime, not an increase in police accountability that was their aim. This end result will exacerbate, rather than mitigate, racial disparities in our criminal justice system.

Fourth, I have read about numerous examples when officers simply turned the camera off.

Sincerely,

Gisela Wilson, PhD
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