Statement of

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before the

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"Five Years of the Metropolitan Police Department's Body-Worn Camera Program: Reflections and Next Steps"

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Good morning and thank you for having me today. I am Dr. Daniel Lawrence, a senior research associate in the Justice Policy Center at the Urban Institute. The views I express today are my own and should not be attributed to the Urban Institute, its trustees, or its funders. The Urban Institute is a nonpartisan, nonprofit, social and economic policy research organization located in DC. Founded in 1968, the Urban Institute brings decades of objective analysis and expertise to policy debates. The Justice Policy Center focuses on criminological research and its law enforcement portfolio is quite extensive.

In May 2015, I spoke to the council about the Metropolitan Police Department's (MPD's) newly implemented body-worn camera (BWC) program in a similar setting. During that testimony, I advised that department policies for BWCs needed to be carefully considered and developed on the use and management of the cameras as well as the release of footage information. Since that time, Urban has published comprehensive reviews of BWC research,[1] developed a BWC legislation tracker for all 50 states,[2] and conducted studies with multiple police departments across the country to examine the impact and use of BWCs. I'll summarize the findings and policy implications now, and advise the council to review the studies.

Figure 1

Officer Average Body-Worn Camera Activation Rates, with Time Period Variation

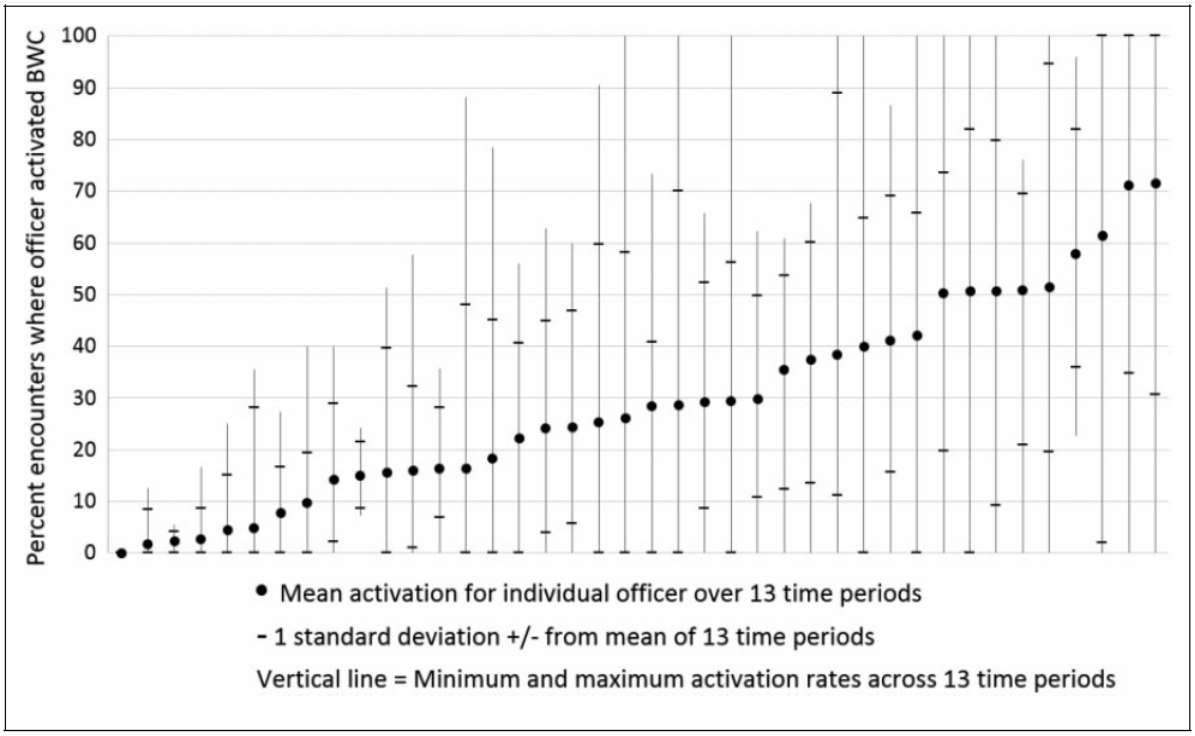
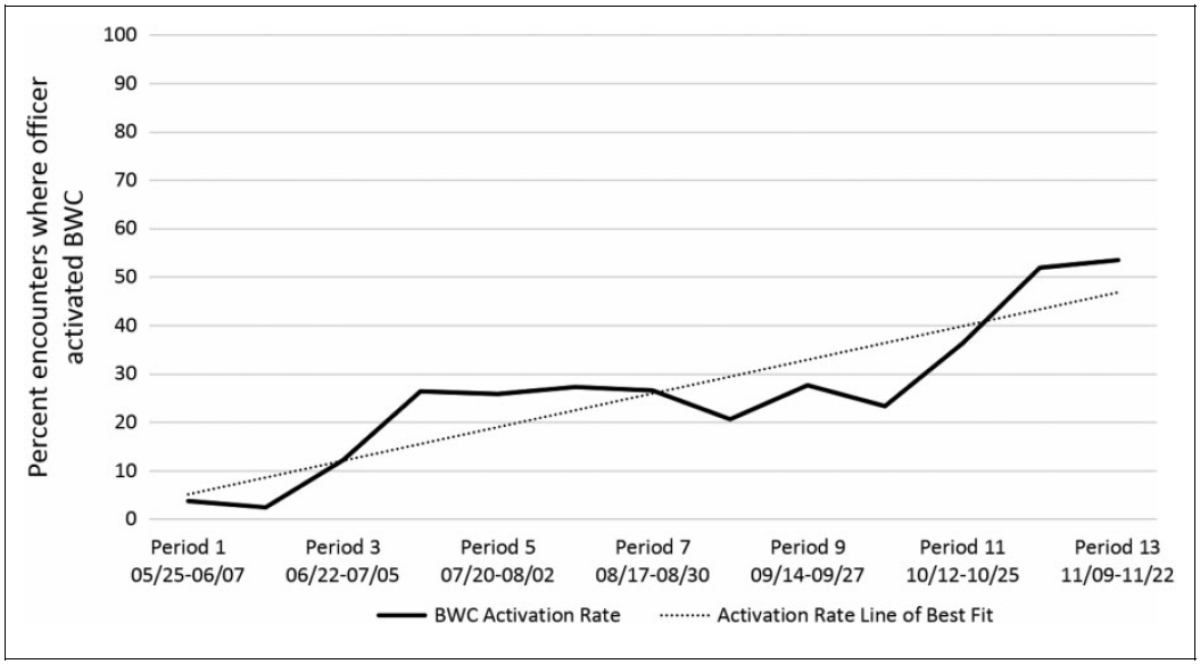


Figure 2

Time Period Group Average Body-Worn Camera Activation Rates



In Anaheim, California, we examined BWC activation rates among a group of officers.[3] The department's policy is similar to MPD's, where officers are expected to turn their cameras on during most, if not all, face-to-face interactions with community members. We found that activation rates among the officers varied widely in the first six months of use, ranging from 0 to 72 percent (figure 1). As the officers became more comfortable with the technology, activation rates increased from 3 percent to 54 percent over the six-month period (figure 2).

Figure 2

Percent Body-Worn Camera Activations by Activity

	Month of Study						
Policing Activity	Overall (%)	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	5 (%)	6 (%)
Violent crime	44.7	7.1	41.0	53.1	62.6	52.8	61.3
Property crime	35.4	2.4	35.8	37.4	46.8	44.6	59.8
Public assist	27.0	1.9	23.2	38.5	29.7	34.0	46.3
Traffic stops	25.0	8.6	16.2	18.1	12.5	17.2	75.2
Minor crime	24.3	0.5	19.7	23.1	36.0	36.5	41.7
Disturbance	21.6	1.6	17.9	24.3	31.2	32.1	47.1
Suspicious	20.8	0.0	18.7	20.1	18.1	40.8	37.1
Proactive policing	20.7	2.7	20.8	23.4	24.2	26.9	30.6
Traffic related	16.2	2.0	13.6	25.6	14.1	21.5	24.6

We also examine whether activations differed across policing activities, and found that officers are much more likely to activate their cameras for responses to violent and property crimes than they are for other policing activities (figure 3). These results indicate that officers view BWCs to benefit criminal events most, and perhaps rightfully so, but they miss opportunities to record positive community interactions or other types of interactions where a citizen complaint may develop. As such, the failure to activate a BWC for all types of policing activities can severely limit the potential benefits of the technology.

In Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Urban conducted multiple analyses to assess the use and impact of the department's 1,100-officer BWC program. We first examined whether BWCs affected the amount of officers who had use-of-force incidents and citizen complaints against them through a randomized controlled trial with 504 officers.[4] Similar to the evaluation by the Lab at DC with the MPD, we found that BWCs had no impact on use-of-force incidents; however, we did find a 50 percent reduction in the amount of BWC-equipped officers who had a citizen complaint. Though this reduction is promising, it's worth emphasizing that it is not clear if complaints were reduced because BWCs had a "civilizing effect" during police-community interactions, or because community members were more reluctant to lodge a complaint against an officer wearing a BWC.

We also examined how BWCs affect officers' self-initiated activities in Milwaukee.[5] We found that BWCs had no impact in the overall amount of proactive activities that officers conducted, but that the make-up of these activities did change. We found that officers with BWCs were less likely to engage in proactive activities that are highly discretionary and could lead to confrontations with community members. Specially, officers with BWCs conducted 8 percent fewer subject stops, on average, compared with the control group. At the same time, BWC officers conducted 22 percent more park and walk activities, which serve a community policing function and are unlikely to result in confrontation or in a use of force. These findings suggest that officers are becoming more hesitant to engage in activities that may result in negative interactions with the public after receiving body cameras, and are replacing these activities with ones that are potentially more positive or community-oriented.

The findings I detailed today emphasize the need for patrol officer supervisors to proactively review metrics on individual officer BWC activations across a host of different policing activities, as well as how those activities may change after implementation. Many studies, including some from the Urban Institute,[6] have looked into how BWCs might affect community attitudes and views toward the officer and police. But for BWCs to be most successful, supervisors need training and policies to hold officers accountable, not just in wearing the cameras, but also in how and when the cameras are used. These capabilities for supervisors do not currently exist in policing practice. Thank you for your time.

Endnotes

[1] Bryce E. Peterson and Daniel S. Lawrence, "Body Cameras and Policing," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Criminology and Criminal Justice*, January 2019, http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264079.013.524.

[2] Nancy G. La Vigne, Margaret Ulle, and Nkechi Erondu, "Police Body-Worn Camera Legislation Tracker," The Urban Institute, https://apps.urban.org/features/body-camera-update/.

[3] Daniel S. Lawrence, David McClure, Aili Malm, Mathew Lynch, and Nancy G. La Vigne, "Activation of Body-Worn Cameras: Variation by Officer, Over Time, and by Policing Activity," *Criminal Justice* Review 44, no. 3: 339–55, https://doi.org/10.1177/0734016819846228.

[4] Bryce Peterson, Lilly Yu, Nancy G. La Vigne, and Daniel S. Lawrence, "The Milwaukee Police Department's Body-Worn Camera Program: Evaluation Findings and Key Takeaways," The Urban Institute, May 16, 2018, https://urbn.is/2khj2mf.

[5] Daniel S. Lawrence and Bryce Peterson, "How Do Body-Worn Cameras Affect the Amount and Makeup of Police-Initiated Activities? A Randomized Controlled Trial in Milwaukee, Wisconsin," *Journal of Experimental Criminology* (forthcoming).

[6] Daniel S. Lawrence, Bryce Peterson, and Paige Thompson, "Community Views of Milwaukee's Police Body-Worn Camera Program: Results from Three Waves of Community Surveys," The Urban Institute, August 28, 2018, https://urbn.is/2oimS0l; David McClure, Nancy G. La Vigne, Mathew Lynch, Laura Golian, Daniel S. Lawrence, and Aili Malm, "How Body Cameras Affect Community Members' Perceptions of Police: Results from a Randomized Controlled Trial of One Agency's Pilot," The Urban Institute, June 22, 2017, www.urbn.is/2sVTocl.