

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2014 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

Senate Bill 539

(Senator Ramirez, *et al.*)

Judicial Proceedings

Task Force to Study the Implementation and Use of Body Cameras by Law
Enforcement Officers

This bill creates a Task Force to Study the Implementation and Use of Body Cameras by Law Enforcement Officers. The bill provides for the composition and chair of the task force. Task force staffing is assigned to the Governor's Office of Crime, Control, and Prevention (GOCCP) and the Department of State Police (DSP). The final report of the task force, with findings and recommendations, must be submitted to the Governor and the General Assembly by December 1, 2014.

The bill takes effect June 1, 2014, and terminates December 31, 2014.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Any expense reimbursements for task force members and staffing costs for GOCCP and DSP are assumed to be minimal and absorbable within existing budgeted resources.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Bill Summary: The task force is required to consider and make recommendations on:

- the procurement of body cameras for law enforcement officers, including standards related to hardware, digital storage and integration, and vendor support;

- the best practices and procedures for (1) the use of body cameras by law enforcement officers, including which law enforcement activities should be recorded and (2) training law enforcement officers on the use of body cameras;
- any potential constitutional issues that may arise from the use of body cameras by law enforcement officers;
- the funding options available for the acquisition of body cameras by State and local law enforcement agencies; and
- any other issues the task force determines relevant to the implementation and use of body cameras by law enforcement officers.

Background: Several states and local governments are considering requiring police officers to wear cameras as part of the uniform, usually attached on glasses or headgear. Although many police vehicles are equipped with cameras, incidents that take place away from the vehicle are not captured. In Maryland, only the Laurel Police Department has officers that wear cameras. Proponents have said the video recordings are valuable training tools, assist officers in writing accurate reports, and can be used as evidence. Additionally, the Laurel Police Department reports that the video cameras have led to a reduction in complaints against officers. Police departments in California, New Mexico, and Texas use wearable cameras.

The cameras and related equipment, including data storage, in current use in the City of Laurel are the AXON flex units available through TASER International, Inc. The cost for each camera was about \$500. The City of Laurel has been outfitting its full patrol force at a rate of about 25% per year, with about 50% (25 officers) currently outfitted with an AXON unit. While the operational life of each camera is expected to be five years, the City of Laurel budgets for cameras on a three-year basis. The current three-year costs for each law enforcement body camera in Laurel is about \$2,000, which includes the camera, storage, and data uploading. The City of Laurel has an annual contract for data storage in the amount of \$1,050 for up to 300 gigabytes of storage. Laurel officers patrol on 10-hour shifts and download the data from each camera at the end of each shift, a process that takes about 30 minutes. Stored data is maintained for a period of six months, unless known to be needed for a criminal trial or related matters. The Laurel video units *do* record audio. The Laurel Police Department also reports that in March, TASER International, Inc. will be offering a mobile charger and download station that will work with in-car computers.

According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, the following legislation is pending in New Hampshire and New York relating to video cameras and law enforcement officers:

- New Hampshire – 1575-FN-A of 2014 would require each uniformed law enforcement officer of the Division of State Police to wear an operating camera with a microphone for audio capture at all times when the officer is interacting with the public in his or her official capacity.
- New York – A8243-2013 would direct the Commissioner of Criminal Justice Services to establish a pilot program for the use of body-worn video recording equipment on certain police officers in New York City.

The U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, National Institute of Justice (NIJ), produced *A Primer on Body-Worn Cameras for Law Enforcement* in September 2012. The report states that body-worn cameras (BWCs) can be attached to various body areas, including the head (by helmet, glasses, or other means) or to the body (by pocket, badge, or other means). BWCs have the capability to record officer interactions that previously could only be captured by in-car or interrogation room camera systems.

NIJ also states that there are many specification issues to consider before purchasing a camera system. The system requirements and trade-offs are dependent on the intended use, budget, unit cost, interoperability, operating environment, and other factors. According to NIJ, specifications to consider include battery life, video quality, recording limits, night recording capabilities, camera focal width, camera placement, and radio integration capability. NIJ also includes audio recording capabilities under specifications to consider.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: HB 539 (Delegate Rosenberg) - Judiciary.

Information Source(s): Governor's Office of Crime Control and Prevention, Department of State Police, City of Laurel, National Conference of State Legislatures, U.S. Department of Justice, Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - February 16, 2014
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