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Re: Senate Bill 583

It's a little strange to be a reporter discussing a bill in this capacity—and that's why I have decided to do it. Reporters are supposed to be impartial and never weigh in—as if the things they learn reporting aren't allowed to stick with them. But if a reporter's work can change the hearts and minds of readers, it makes sense the reporting would change the heart and mind of the reporter too.

I am speaking in support of SB 583 because what I have realized over the last four years of talking to people victimized by Baltimore Police Officers and watching body camera footage of police misconduct is this: Body worn cameras make it harder for out of control police officers to lie, beat, and steal.

Adding the ability to see 120 seconds prior to the camera being turned on, as Senate Bill 583 says, would make it even harder for out of control cops to lie, beat, and steal.

Let's begin with one of the more infamous body-worn camera incidents in Baltimore. It involved a 2017 of an arrest where it appeared a Baltimore Police officer planted drugs. When the public defender's office viewed body worn camera footage of this drug seizure, they realized that the previous 30 seconds recorded and saved once an officer hits record revealed what appeared to be an officer planting drugs, then hitting "record" on his body worn camera to capture himself "finding" those drugs—the drugs that it sure did seem like he had just planted.

At the time, the claim by the police was that it was not an example of planting evidence but rather an officer "recreating" the discovery of evidence that the officer had not recorded when he discovered it.

A body worn camera automatically recording and saving two minutes rather than 30 seconds prior to the camera being turned on would have provided some additional clarification.

In another incident I have seen, it seemed painfully obvious that a police officer coached someone on what to say when they were recorded. A man, his face swollen almost beyond recognition declared, on-camera, that he ran and fell, the police did nothing to him. Whatever happened before the recording began, I think, would have been a bit more difficult to set-up and sustain for two whole minutes as opposed to just 30 seconds.

And consider this: When body cameras were introduced to the Baltimore Police Department, the prospect of having to wear them struck fear in some of the embattled department's worst cops.

Let's discuss an August 2016 stop that involved members of the Gun Trace Task Force. They claimed they stopped a man for not wearing his seat belt. They claimed they then searched his car and found cocaine and a gun in the car.

By the time the body camera was turned on, however, the victim had been taken out of the car. The gun and drugs had already been "discovered."

The officer turned on his body camera mid-Mirandization. As a result, the camera missed the nature of the stop and even the 30-second rewind only revealed the start of that mirandization.

The man who was arrested protested on camera that while he was not wearing his seatbelt, it was only because he was driving from a gas pump to an air pump.

Here is a brief video I made for [an art exhibition](#) that details the full extent of this disturbing arrest: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IViO5wZLyII>

Before you watch that video, recall what I said is not captured on the body camera: the stop and initial detainment of the man in the video. And because we don't see any of that, it became the police officers' words against the man's words in court.

The other reason this incident is important is because the police did a number of illegal things later on when they *thought* the body camera was turned off. This is significant because it shows you how police operate when they think they aren't being recorded. They joke about hitting a man. They mock him for believing the 4th Amendment would actually protect him. They drive to the man's house and get into his house and search it without a warrant.

If you have some additional time, you may want to view this other video I made, detailing the police stopping a man by crashing into his car and then seizing cocaine which they then took and sold: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MMGcELT3XwI>

A body camera alone cannot stop that degree of corruption, a questionable or downright illegal police stop would be illuminated by having access to more footage before that officer hit record.

It would be much harder to begin orchestrating such a complicated ruse if two minutes were captured. Two minutes will be more informative than 30 seconds. I

This is an incremental increase in transparency.

We all spent the summer watching our Twitter feeds fill up with footage of police officers attacking people protesting police violence, only to see police departments tell you that what you saw in these videos was not actually what you saw. In other words, we know police officers and police departments are willing to lie.

And I know that police officers turn their cameras off at opportune times or conveniently forget to turn them on. They position them in a way where you can't see what their hands are doing. They swing them around so you see a blur instead of their partner's fist meeting someone's face. This bill won't stop any of that. Other bills can try and do that. Body cameras, as the ACLU and others have warned, are not a panacea. Indeed, for the most part, body cameras further surveill the most surveilled Americans, but—and this is a significant but—police have them strapped to their chests already and some of the worst police do not like them already.

Making it a bit more difficult for police to control the footage by expanding what is recorded to two minutes, simply makes sense.