



**BODY-WORN  
CAMERA**  
TRAINING & TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

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BODY-WORN CAMERA SITE SPOTLIGHT  
**JONESBORO, AR**



**HARNESSING THE EVIDENTIARY VALUE  
OF BODY-WORN CAMERAS**

MAY 2021

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Jonesboro, Arkansas, is a city of 75,000 in the northeastern corner of the state, approximately 70 miles from Memphis, Tennessee. Jonesboro is the birthplace of bestselling novelist John Grisham and was home to Hattie Caraway, the nation's first elected female US senator. Located within one of the fastest-growing counties in Arkansas, Jonesboro is home to Arkansas State University and its 13,000 students.

The Jonesboro Police Department (PD) has 169 sworn officer positions and a total of 33 full- and part-time civilian employees. In 2018, Jonesboro PD received a grant from the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) Body-Worn Camera Policy and Implementation Program (BWCPPI). According to Assistant Chief Lynn Waterworth, the decision to deploy BWCs came from Chief Rick Elliott's concern over

“a breakdown in the relationship between the police department and the community, and (wanting) to re-establish that relationship.”

The Jonesboro PD also sought to enhance accountability and provide a greater degree of transparency to the community. BWCs were deployed to all sworn personnel, as well as to non-sworn employees involved in code enforcement and animal control duties.

Jonesboro PD harnesses the evidentiary value of BWCs to achieve their program goals. They effectively use BWC footage to make needed modifications to their BWC policy, to hold officers accountable, and to exonerate officers from frivolous complaints. The department uses BWCs to foster community engagement and to expedite the investigations of officer-involved shootings (OIS). The centerpiece of their BWC program is a strong internal review process, in which first-line supervisors review officers' footage to monitor compliance with BWC policy and to assess officers' performance.

## **KEY FEATURES OF THE JONESBORO PD INTERNAL COMPLIANCE REVIEW PROCESS**

Jonesboro PD started their internal compliance review process after attending the BJA BWC PIP National Meeting in 2019. They require front-line supervisors to review at least one random incident per officer within a 30-day period, which is in addition to the BWC footage that they regularly review (all arrests, use of force, citizen complaints). Sergeants are looking for many things when they review footage, including the following:

- Adherence to policy and procedure concerning search, seizure, and other actions
- Officer demeanor, tone, and dialogue
- Officer safety
- Correct camera angle
- De-escalation activity
- Responses to aggression or resistance
- Overall policy compliance

Additionally, random calls for service and traffic stops are pulled from the computer-aided dispatch (CAD) system and matched to BWC metadata to ensure that officers record all required call types. Sergeants review all types of calls on all shifts at random times of day and on random days of the week.

Lieutenants review all BWC footage of response to aggression (use of force) incidents, including footage from the camera of the officer who used force, and footage from all BWCs on the scene. Each time a sergeant or lieutenant reviews an officer's footage, the supervisor completes a checklist that includes yes/no responses to questions about: incident initiation (self, dispatch); comprehensiveness of footage (from beginning, covering entire event); officer contact (frisk, search, restraint); and outcome (arrest), among other things. The department leadership initially had concerns about the additional workload this task placed on sergeants, but they felt it was important to be thorough and proactive rather than to let an issue potentially go unnoticed. Captain Scott Roper states that it is "terribly important that we do these (reviews), and do them regularly. So it's something they've got to do..."

If sergeants identify any potential training opportunities or issues with an officer, they meet immediately with that officer to address them. Officers are also recognized for exceptional work captured on BWCs. The internal compliance review process has led to numerous benefits for the department and officers. We discuss several of these success stories below, as well as some other examples of how Jonesboro PD has effectively capitalized on the evidentiary value of BWCs.

## **JONESBORO PD SUCCESS STORIES**

### **Activation issues were identified**

Early on, supervisors discovered that officers sometimes did not activate their BWCs when required, often because they got preoccupied with aspects of the call or they simply forgot to hit the record button. The department leadership revised the BWC policy so that officers are now required to turn their cameras on immediately after being dispatched to a call. This change in policy has dramatically reduced this "failure to activate" problem.

### **BWCs can help to exonerate officers from frivolous complaints**

When asked about BWC footage exonerating an officer from a frivolous or unfounded complaint, Assistant Chief Waterworth said, "...that's like monthly for us." In one instance, an officer's BWC helped provide clarity on a particularly volatile situation. Officers had stopped a vehicle for running a red light, and the driver pulled a gun and put it to his own head after the officers approached the vehicle. As the officers negotiated with the driver, a female citizen, who was across the street, began filming the encounter via Facebook Live. Tragically, the driver took his own life. To make sure they could approach the car safely, the officers fired a bean bag round to break the window of the vehicle, which prompted the woman filming to yell, "The cops just shot this guy six times! They

just shot him for no reason!” The department faced immediate public backlash, but they quickly released the BWC video, which showed the officers did not violate policy or procedure and did everything they could to resolve the situation peacefully. As Assistant Chief Waterworth describes it:

“...we went from ‘The cops, without cause, shot this man six times and murdered him,’ to people saying, ‘God bless you as a human being working so hard to save a life. You’re a hero in my book.’ Just by using that body cam video, it was over.”

BWC footage review has uncovered several incidents of officer behavior that warranted immediate attention. In one situation, BWC review showed a new officer committing several violations of officer safety protocols. The officer’s supervisor initiated training for the officer, followed by written reprimands when additional violations occurred. Supervisors continued to review his BWC footage, and he was eventually fired after the discovery of a serious policy violation.

### **BWCs can demonstrate exceptional police work**

In another incident, BWC footage revealed how an officer’s heroic actions during a domestic violence call saved a child’s life. By the time the officer arrived at the scene, the situation had already escalated violently, and a child had been stabbed. The BWC footage showed the officer remaining calm as he applied a tourniquet to control the child’s bleeding until emergency medical services arrived. Footage from the incident proved to be a valuable training tool, and the officer was commended for life-saving action. Captain Roper states,

“We took action to commend the officer after we were able to review the video and see what an extraordinary job he did.”

### **BWCs are valuable in the investigation of an OIS**

When a Jonesboro PD officer’s BWC captured an incident that ended in an OIS, the footage not only helped the Arkansas State Police investigators make a swift determination on appropriate use of force but also addressed public concerns when Jonesboro PD quickly released the video. Adopting an approach used by the Los Angeles Police Department that was described at the BWCP National Meeting, Jonesboro released the footage with narration of the event. This served to explain the incident thoroughly and dispel inaccurate rumors that had already started circulating. From Assistant Chief Waterworth’s perspective,



**You can view a narrated BWC video from Jonesboro PD here.**

“It gives you...a platform to show what really happened... show your side of it. But it still doesn’t tell everything. So sometimes you may have to add a little bit of explanation, if you will. And so that’s what we did. And we’ve actually done that on more than one (video).”

### **BWCs have benefits for detectives and prosecutors**

The evidentiary value of body-worn cameras has become apparent for the investigation and prosecution of crime. Officers and detectives have been able to identify witnesses at serious crime scenes. Prosecutors have commented that the increased level of detail of events at the scene has simplified the process of presenting cases and providing evidence in court. Detectives are now able to share all case-related video with prosecutors much more quickly, and it is easier for prosecutors to respond to discovery motions. There was an initial learning curve, Assistant Chief Waterworth says, “But we figured out how to put together case files, give (prosecutors) access to it, and now that they have figured out, ‘Oh my gosh, I don’t have to keep up with 15 discs and then make copies of those 15 discs when someone files a motion for discovery, I can just send a link.’”

### **BWCs have value for community engagement**

BWCs provide an opportunity for enhancing transparency and trust through community engagement. During meetings between the Jonesboro PD and the community following the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota, it became clear that many residents were not aware of the ways in which Jonesboro PD uses BWCs as an accountability tool. Community leaders were invited to headquarters to hear about the internal compliance review process, and they reviewed BWC footage of several cases. This meeting enhanced community trust by demonstrating to the public that Jonesboro PD is committed to accountability. Assistant Chief Waterworth noted:

“Body camera video is not a ‘fix all’ for accountability issues in policing, but it is an invaluable tool for agencies that are committed to that cause. Open communication with both officers and the public can lay the foundation for these issues being resolved.”

**This project was completed with support from our partners at CNA and Justice Security Strategies, Inc. Dr. White has a consulting relationship with compensation from CNA.**

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*This project was supported by Grant No. 2015-DE-BX-K002 awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance. The Bureau of Justice Assistance is a component of the Department of Justice’s Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the Office for Victims of Crime, and the SMART Office. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.*