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The Past, Present, and Future of Police Body Cameras

By Logan Seacrest and Jillian Snider

The line between public security and state surveillance lies not in technology, but in the policies that govern it.

Executive Summary

Artificial intelligence (AI) is reshaping the criminal justice system. Law enforcement agencies are using it to predict crime, expedite response, and streamline routine tasks. One of the most promising applications can be found in body camera programs, where AI is transforming unmanageable archives of footage into active sources of insight.

AI can now analyze hundreds of hours of video in seconds. Early pilot programs suggest that these video-reviewing tools, when guided by human oversight, can uncover critical evidence that might otherwise be overlooked, reduce pretrial bottlenecks, and identify potential instances of officer misconduct. But these benefits come with risks. Absent clear guardrails, the same technologies could drift toward government overreach, blurring the line between public safety and state surveillance.

The line between public security and state surveillance lies not in technology, but in the policies that govern it. To responsibly harness AI and mitigate these risks, we recommend that agencies and policymakers:

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- **Establish and enforce clear use policies.** Statewide rules for body camera use and AI governance ensure consistency across jurisdictions, particularly in areas like body camera activation, evidence sharing, and public disclosure.
- **Pair technology with human oversight.** AI should enhance—not replace—human decision-making. Final judgments must rest with trained personnel, supported by independent policy oversight from civilian review boards.
- **Safeguard civil liberties.** Safeguards must be in place to protect individual rights, limit surveillance overreach, and ensure data transparency. For example, limiting facial recognition during constitutionally protected activities like protests will help ensure AI is aligned with democratic ideals.

With the right guardrails in place, AI can elevate body cameras from after-action archival tools to always-on intelligence tools, informing decisions in the moment, when it matters most.

Introduction

Imagine a patrol officer walking down the street. Approaching a small gathering, her body camera vibrates twice and beeps—an alert. Hundreds of feet overhead, a drone silently surveys the scene, as a security camera at a nearby coffee shop zooms in on the crowd for a better view. The three livestreams converge, miles away, deep within the police department's real-time crime center. Using facial recognition, an AI system scans the crowd, cross-referencing names with social media accounts and a database of outstanding warrants. Within seconds, the AI system has identified two suspects, flagging them for arrest.

AGENTIC AI

Goes beyond passive review and data analysis to proactively look for threats, initiate alerts, and make decisions.

This is an example of "agentic AI"—a technology that goes beyond passive review and data analysis to proactively look for threats, initiate alerts, and make decisions.[1] At a major international airport, where terrorism is a serious threat, this type of predictive policing could save lives. But at a political protest in a public park, the same scene evokes a far more troubling vision of state surveillance and control.

This study explores how body camera technology and policy have developed over time and where they are headed. It examines the challenges of video management, highlights new AI tools, and assesses findings from recent pilot programs. It also discusses the broader implications of integrating AI into policing—from transparency gains to surveillance risks—and outlines practical steps to ensure that these systems are implemented responsibly.

1. Erik Pounds, "What Is Agentic AI?," NVIDIA, Oct. 22, 2024. https://blogs.nvidia.com/blog/what-is-agentic-ai.

By balancing innovation with constitutional principles, policymakers can shape a future in which AI strengthens public trust and makes communities safer.

PAST: The Foundations of Body Camera Technology and Policy

The story of body cameras is one of technology colliding with public policy and human behavior. In the early 2010s, outrage over police misconduct—especially when captured on camera—created a demand for a video record of all police encounters.[2] Garnering broad support from law enforcement advocates and critics alike, body cameras went from being strange, experimental devices to standard-issue gear in little more than a decade, becoming one of the most widespread wearable devices in history.[3]

Body Camera Boom

The first U.S. body camera program was piloted in 2012.[4] A series of early successes, which included reports of dramatic reductions in use-of-force and other citizen complaints, kickstarted a wave of adoption.[5] Following the Michael Brown shooting in 2014, the Obama administration announced a $75 million initiative to fund a nationwide expansion of body camera programs, aiming to equip as many as 50,000 officers over three years.[6] Federal grants enabled even small rural departments with fewer resources to adopt the technology by covering the cost of equipment, software, data storage, and information technology personnel.[7]

Shortly thereafter, body camera footage began to make its way from police stations to courtrooms. Video was valuable at trial—corroborating officer testimony, clarifying timelines, and resolving ambiguities that could otherwise jeopardize a case.[8] Cases with video evidence could be decided more quickly, with fewer disputed facts. Video was thought to be more objective and reliable than witness testimony.[9] By 2016, nearly half of all law enforcement agencies in the country had implemented body camera programs.[10] Thus, in a few short years, what began as a niche experiment had become standard operating procedure.

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2. Michael D. White and Aili Malm, *Cops, Cameras, and Crisis: The Potential and the Perils of Body-Worn Cameras* (NYU Press, 2020). https://nyupress.org/9781479850150/cops-cameras-and-crisis.
3. "The History of Police Body Cameras: From Invention to Innovation," Axon, last accessed May 20, 2025. https://www.axon.com/resources/police-body-cameras.
4. "Body-worn Cameras: The Complete Guide for Law Enforcement Professionals," Axon, last accessed May 4, 2025. https://www.axon.com/resources/body-cameras-complete-guide.
5. Barak Ariel et al., "The Effect of Police Body-Worn Cameras on Use of Force and Citizens' Complaints Against the Police: A Randomized Control Trial," *Journal of Quantitative Criminology* 31 (2015), pp. 509-535. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10940-014-9236-3.
6. Office of the Press Secretary, "Fact Sheet: Strengthening Community Policing," The White House President Barack Obama, Dec. 1, 2014. https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/12/01/fact-sheet-strengthening-community-policing.
7. Bryce Peterson and Daniel Lawrence, "Body Cameras and Policing," Urban Institute, Jan. 28, 2019. https://www.urban.org/research/publication/body-cameras-and-policing.
8. Tim Cushing, "Prosecutors Benefiting Most From Police Body Cameras," Techdirt, Dec. 28, 2017. https://www.techdirt.com/2017/12/28/prosecutors-benefiting-most-police-body-cameras.
9. Brett Chapman, "Body-Worn Cameras: What the Evidence Tells Us," *National Institute of Justice Journal* 280 (January 2020). https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/252035.pdf.
10. Shelley S. Hyland, "Body-Worn Cameras in Law Enforcement Agencies, 2016," Bureau of Justice Statistics, November 2018. https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/bwclea16.pdf.

THE ORIGINS OF BODY CAMERAS

The modern body camera would likely not exist without the invention of the iPhone. In the early 2010s, fierce competition in the smartphone industry produced ever-thinner phones, higher-resolution image sensors, more efficient batteries, and inexpensive solid-state storage.[11] Body camera manufacturers tapped into this hyper-efficient global supply chain, producing body cameras at a fraction of the cost that would have been possible a few years prior.[12] For the first time in history, it became possible to equip every patrol officer with a durable, lightweight, inexpensive camera capable of recording dozens of hours of video and audio.

The Blue Wall of Silence

Demand for body cameras emerged from grassroots efforts to improve government transparency and check government power.[13] Public polling showed overwhelming support for these programs, with some surveys reporting over 90 percent approval.[14] Communities most affected by aggressive policing hoped that body cameras would expose patterns that had long been dismissed as anecdotal.[15] Other proponents theorized that body cameras might help dismantle the traditional "blue wall of silence"—the unspoken code among police officers to ignore colleagues' errors or misconduct.[16] With cameras rolling, accountability would be improved, and corrupt officers would be less able to falsify evidence, omit important details, and shield each other from consequences.[17]

Proponents of body-worn cameras theorized that they might help dismantle the traditional "blue wall of silence"—the unspoken code among police officers to ignore colleagues' errors or misconduct.

Law enforcement agencies initially viewed body cameras with caution. Police were concerned about being micromanaged, second-guessed, and constantly watched—a sentiment confirmed by research showing that wearing body cameras can increase officer stress if not coupled with a supportive agency culture.[18] Officers also worried that the cameras would be used to discipline

11. Wolfgang Bock et al., "The Mobile Revolution: How Mobile Technologies Drive a Trillion-Dollar Impact," Boston Consulting Group, Jan. 15, 2015. https://www.bcg.com/publications/2015/telecommunications-technology-industries-the-mobile-revolution.
12. Bela Nagy et al., "Statistical Basis for Predicting Technological Progress," *PLOS One* 8:2 (2013), pp. 1-8. https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0052669.
13. Justin Nix et al., "Compliance, noncompliance, and the in-between: Causal effects of civilian demeanor on police officers' cognitions and emotions," *Journal of Experimental Criminology* 15:4 (2019). https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1058&context=criminaljusticefacpub.
14. Matthew S. Crow et al., "Community Perceptions of Police Body-Worn Cameras: The Impact of Views on Fairness, Fear, Performance, and Privacy," *Criminal Justice and Behavior* 44:1 (February 2017), pp. 589-610. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/313357094_Community_Perceptions_of_Police_Body-Worn_Cameras_The_Impact_of_Views_on_Fairness_Fear_Performance_and_Privacy.
15. Barak Ariel et al., "The Deterrence Spectrum: Explaining Why Police Body-Worn Cameras 'Work' or 'Backfire' in Aggressive Police–Public Encounters," *Policing* 12:1 (March 2018), pp. 6-26. https://academic.oup.com/policing/article-abstract/12/1/6/2965583; Jay T. Jennings and Meghan E. Rubado, "Preventing the Use of Deadly Force: The Relationship between Police Agency Policies and Rates of Officer-Involved Gun Deaths," *Public Administration Review* 77:2 (Feb. 27, 2017), pp. 217-226. https://engagedscholarship.csuohio.edu/urban_facpub/1459.
16. Kyle McLean et al., "Body-Worn Cameras in South Carolina: Law Enforcement Executives' Views Concerning Use, Policies, and Outcomes – 2015 South Carolina Law Enforcement Census," University of South Carolina Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice, November 2015. https://sc.edu/study/colleges_schools/artsandsciences/criminology_and_criminal_justice/documents/2015_census_report.pdf.
17. Ibid.
18. Ian T. Adams and Sharon H. Mastracci, "Police Body-Worn Cameras: Effect on Officers' Burnout and Perceived Organizational Support," *Police Quarterly* 22:1 (2018), pp. 5-30. https://ianadamsresearch.com/pdfs/bwc-burnout-postprint.pdf.

rather than support them.[19] Surveys indicated that more than half of officers feared that body cameras might limit their discretion, invite public criticism, or fail to capture the full context of rapidly evolving situations.[20] Eventually, as more cameras were deployed, the sentiment began to shift within policing. Officers and law enforcement leadership began to recognize the benefits, particularly in protecting officers from baseless accusations.[21] As internal policies became more refined—outlining when to activate cameras, how footage could be reviewed, and who had access to footage—officers increasingly viewed body cameras as indispensable public safety tools.[22]

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The Early Days of Body Camera Policy

At first, there were no formal policies or procedures governing body camera programs and, in the early years of police department rollouts, it was not uncommon for officers to simply forget to turn them on.[23] In response, agencies began to establish activation protocols, as well as penalties for failing to follow them.[24] Technology also helped provide solutions, as newer systems could automatically start recording when cruiser lights or Tasers were activated.[25] Still, the lack of consistent standards created a regulatory vacuum that gave individual agencies discretion over what footage the public saw and what remained hidden.[26] Critics alleged that agencies released footage that supported the official department narrative but withheld incriminating videos.[27]

About a decade ago, states began to codify body camera protocols to avoid some of these issues. Early adopters, like South Carolina, required agencies to establish body camera programs and create minimum standards for activation, data retention, access, and privacy. Other states, like Nebraska, opted for a lighter touch, setting up regulatory frameworks but stopping short of mandating cameras.[28] Most large departments were able to adapt relatively quickly, investing in the required training and infrastructure. However, many small rural departments, constrained by budget limitations and staff capacity, struggled to meet new data and transparency requirements. [29]

19. Marthinus C. Koen et al., "The effects of body-worn cameras on police organization and practice: a theory-based analysis," *Policing and Society* 29:8 (2019), pp. 968-984. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10439463.2018.1467907.
20. Janne E. Gaub et al., "Officer Perceptions of Body-Worn Cameras Before and After Deployment: A Study of Three Departments," *Police Quarterly* 19:3 (2016), pp. 275-302. https://bja.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh186/files/media/document/officerpereceptions-of-bwc-before-after-deployment.pdf.
21. Tim Cushing, "Body Cam Footage Clears Police Officer Of Bogus Sexual Assault Allegations," Techdirt, May 29, 2015. https://www.techdirt.com/2015/05/29/body-cam-footage-clears-police-officer-bogus-sexual-assault-allegations.
22. Cynthia Lum et al., "Research on body-worn cameras: What we know, what we need to know," *Criminology & Public Policy* 18:1 (2019), pp. 93-118. https://prohic.nl/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/2020-04-30-BodyWornCamerasMeta.2019.pdf.
23. "Body-worn Cameras a Decade Later: What We Know," Police Executive Research Forum, December 2023. https://www.policeforum.org/assets/BWCdecadelater.pdf.
24. "Body Worn Cameras," City of Alexandria, Dec. 13, 2023. https://www.alexandriava.gov/police-department/body-worn-cameras.
25. "Axon Signal," Axon, last accessed July 2024. https://www.axon.com/products/axon-signal.
26. Eric Umansky, "How Police Have Undermined the Promise of Body Cameras," ProPublica, Dec. 14, 2023. https://www.propublica.org/article/how-police-undermined-promise-body-cameras.
27. Natasha S. Alford, "Body Cameras Were Supposed To Hold Police Accountable — But Getting Footage Is Harder Than You Think," Pulitzer Center, Dec. 12, 2023. https://pulitzercenter.org/stories/body-cameras-were-supposed-hold-police-accountable-getting-footage-harder-you-think.
28. "Are Agencies Required to Release Body-Worn Camera Footage?," Municipal Association of South Carolina, March 2023. https://www.masc.sc/uptown/03-2023/are-agencies-required-release-body-worn-camera-footage; "Body-Worn Camera Laws Database," National Conference of State Legislatures, April 30, 2021. https://www.ncsl.org/civil-and-criminal-justice/body-worn-camera-laws-database; Logan Seacrest, "New research challenges police body camera consensus," Nebraska Legislative Research Office, last accessed April 17, 2025. https://nebraskalegislature.gov/pdf/reports/research/snapshot_bodycam_2020.pdf.
29. Seacrest, "New research challenges police body camera consensus." https://nebraskalegislature.gov/pdf/reports/research/snapshot_bodycam_2020.pdf.

There was also a fierce debate about whether officers should be allowed to review body camera footage before writing a police report. For years, pre-review was standard practice in many departments.[30] But critics pointed out that this practice can unfairly benefit the officers, who are able to align their statements with the footage, rather than offering a contemporaneous account—a crucial distinction in use-of-force investigations.[31] Within the past several years, the pushback against automatic pre-review has gained traction, despite resistance from police unions.[32] In 2019, an estimated 92 percent of departments permitted officers to view footage before giving a statement.[33] Within five years, that figure dropped to just 56 percent.[34] The shift reflects a growing recognition that police accountability requires capturing an officer's unfiltered perception of events.

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Body Camera Program Evaluations

As body camera adoption spread, researchers soon wondered whether they were improving justice outcomes in the ways that advocates had hoped. The core premise behind body cameras rests on the assumption that people behave better when they think they are being watched. The theory was this sense of perceived "social surveillance" would provide everyone with an incentive to behave—officers and civilians alike. However, after more than a decade of body camera use in the field, the evidence supporting that assumption remains mixed.[35] They have proven useful for corroborating testimony and documenting uses of force, but agencies are overwhelmed by the sheer volume of footage the cameras produce. From a return-on-investment perspective, this data-management burden makes many body camera programs inefficient, underutilized, and costly.

Randomized, controlled trials on body camera programs in Rialto, CA, and Las Vegas, NV, found significant reductions in use-of-force incidents and citizen complaints after the technology was incorporated into the field.[36] Although body camera manufacturers cite these findings frequently, the studies' small sample sizes do limit their reliability. In contrast, a larger, more rigorous study of body camera use in Washington, D.C. found no statistically significant differences in any public safety metric—including use of force, citizen complaints, police activity, or judicial outcomes—concluding

30. Tim Cushing, "Body Cam Report Shows Fewer Agencies Are Allowing Cops To View Footage Before Making Statements," Techdirt, Dec. 27, 2023. https://www.techdirt.com/2023/12/27/body-cam-report-shows-fewer-agencies-are-allowing-cops-to-view-footage-before-making-statements.
31. Logan Seacrest and Jillian Snider, "Measured Force: The Benefits of Police Data Transparency," *R Street Policy Study* No. 302, April 2024. https://www.rstreet.org/research/measured-force-the-benefits-of-police-data-transparency.
32. Benjamin Levin, "What's Wrong With Police Unions?," *University of Colorado Law Review* 120 (2020), pp. 1333-1402. https://scholar.law.colorado.edu/faculty-articles/1295.
33. Michael D. White et al., "Key Trends in Body-Worn Camera Policy and Practice: A Four Year Policy Analysis of US Department of Justice-Funded Law Enforcement Agencies," CNA Analysis & Solutions, Arizona State University, and Justice and Security Strategies, Inc., December 2019. https://www.ojp.gov/library/publications/key-trends-body-worn-camera-policy-and-practice-four-year-policy-analysis-us.
34. "Body-Worn Cameras: A Decade Later—What We Know." https://www.policeforum.org/assets/BWCdecadelater.pdf.
35. Ibid., p. 1.
36. Ariel et al., "The Effect of Police Body-Worn Cameras on Use of Force and Citizens' Complaints Against the Police: A Randomized Controlled Trial." https://doi.org/10.1007/s10940-014-9236-3; Anthony A. Braga et al., "The Effects of Body-Worn Cameras on Policy Activity and Police-Citizen Encounters: A Randomized Controlled Trial," *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 108:3 (Summer 2018), pp. 511-538. https://scholarlycommons.law.northwestern.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=7632&context=jclc.

that "we should recalibrate our expectations of body cameras."[37] These findings were supported by a follow-up meta-analysis in 2020 that found no statistically significant effects when body cameras were deployed in the field.[38] Moreover, a study from Phoenix, AZ found that officers wearing cameras were more likely to use force in some situations, particularly when there were no clear rules regarding the use of the technology.[39] Table 1 summarizes key details of these studies. Taken as a whole, the findings suggest that the context and policies governing body cameras likely influence outcomes.

Table 1: Body Camera Program Evaluations

Study Title	Study Location (Year)	Use-of-Force Outcome	Citizen Complaint Outcome	Judicial/ Prosecutorial Outcomes
The Effect of Police Body-Worn Cameras on Use of Force and Citizens' Complaints Against the Police[40]	Rialto, CA (2012-2013)	↓ 50%	↓ 88%	N/A
The Benefits of Body-Worn Cameras: New Findings from a Randomized Controlled Trial at the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department[41]	Las Vegas, NV (2014-2015)	↓ 11.5%	↓ 16.5%	N/A
Evaluating the Effects of Police Body-Worn Cameras[42]	Washington, D.C. (2015-2017)	No effect	No effect	N/A
Evaluating the Impact of Officer Body-Worn Cameras in the Phoenix Police Department [43]	Phoenix, AZ (2013 & 2017)	↑ Increase (in some models)	↓ Decrease	Higher rates of charges filed and guilty pleas (for domestic violence cases)
Body-Worn Cameras' Effects on Police Use of Force and Citizen Complaints: A Systematic Review[44]	Meta-analysis (2020)	No overall effect	No overall effect	N/A
Body-Worn Cameras: What the Evidence Tells Us[45]	NIJ review (2020)	Mixed; some reductions, some null effects	Mixed; some reductions, some null effects	Faster resolution of complaints; improved evidentiary value
The Effect of Body-Worn Cameras on the Adjudication of Citizen Complaints Against Police Officers[46]	Multi-site randomized controlled trial (2023)	N/A	N/A	9.9% increase in sustained findings; fewer dismissals

37. David Yokum et al., "A randomized control trial evaluating the effects of police body-worn cameras," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 116:21 (May 21, 2019), pp. 10329-10332. https://www.pnas.org/doi/epdf/10.1073/pnas.1814773116.
38. Ibid., p. 1.
39. Cynthia Lum et al. https://prohic.nl/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/2020-04-30-BodyWornCamerasMeta.2019.pdf.
40. Ariel et al., "The Effect of Police Body-Worn Cameras on Use of Force and Citizens' Complaints Against the Police." https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10940-014-9236-3.
41. Braga et al. https://scholarlycommons.law.northwestern.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=7632&context=jclc.
42. David Yokum et al., "Evaluating the Effects of Police Body-Worn Cameras: A Randomized Controlled Trial," The Lab @ DC, Oct. 20, 2017. https://bwc.thelab.dc.gov/TheLabDC_MPD_BWC_Working_Paper_10.20.17.pdf.
43. Charles M. Katz et al., "Evaluating the Impact of Officer Body-Worn Cameras in the Phoenix Police Department," ASU Center for Violence Prevention and Community Safety, December 2014. https://publicservice.asu.edu/sites/g/files/litvpz276/files/ppd_spi_feb_20_2015_final.pdf.
44. Cynthia Lum et al., "Body-Worn Cameras' Effects on Police Use of Force and Citizen Complaints: A Systematic Review," *Campbell Systematic Reviews* 16:3 (Sept. 9, 2020). https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8356344.
45. Chapman. https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/252035.pdf.
46. Suat Cubukcu, "The Effect of Body-Worn Cameras on the Adjudication of Citizen Complaints of Police Misconduct," *Justice Quarterly* 40:7 (2023). https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/07418825.2023.2222789.

Collectively, these evaluations also suggest that body cameras may not necessarily be the silver bullet they were once billed as—a conclusion reflected in the Department of Justice's rating of body cameras as "ineffective" across a range of metrics, including officer use of force, officer injuries, officer-initiated calls for service, traffic stops, field interviews, and arrests.[47]

To realize the full potential of this technology, not only do agencies and prosecutors have to review more video, they need to operationalize that review. Today, footage is usually reviewed only after a complaint is filed or when a case is set to go to trial, leaving key evidence, training opportunities, and patterns of misconduct buried in terabytes of unexamined digital video.[48] Fortunately, for the first time since body cameras were introduced, AI and other technological advances are giving criminal justice professionals the tools to unlock new insights at scale.

PRESENT: The AI Revolution

Almost 80 percent of large law enforcement agencies in the United States now use body cameras regularly, and the programs enjoy wide bipartisan support.[49] Yet the sheer volume of video footage these cameras generate continues to strain departmental resources and slow oversight efforts. While videos with clear "evidentiary" value are flagged, it is not always immediately obvious what footage may ultimately prove valuable. As a result, vast amounts of body camera footage languish on servers unwatched and uncatalogued.[50] Nearly a decade into the body camera era, new AI tools are finally making it possible to transform this overwhelming volume of footage from an expensive liability into usable intelligence. The following section explores how police and attorneys are leveraging AI to review and operationalize body cameras more effectively.

The Policy Landscape Today

Despite the widespread adoption of body cameras, there is still no national consensus on how they should be used, what should be recorded, or who should have access to the footage. Most agencies mandate that cameras be turned on during enforcement actions such as traffic stops, arrests, and searches.[51] Although some states lay out the rules in statutes, other states have no uniform standards at all, leaving departments to craft their own rules or to operate without standards altogether. As a result, policies vary widely across states and even across jurisdictions. For instance, some departments

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47. Lum et al., "Research on body-worn cameras: What we know, what we need to know." https://prohic.nl/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/2020-04-30-BodyWornCamerasMeta.2019.pdf.
48. Martin Kaste, "Human reviewers can't keep up with police bodycam videos. AI now gets the job," NPR, Sept. 24, 2024. https://www.npr.org/2024/09/23/nx-s1-5096298/human-reviewers-cant-keep-up-with-all-the-police-body-cam-videos-now-theyre-giving-the-job-to-ai.
49. James Daley, "Body-worn Cameras Build Transparency and Trust for Law Enforcement Across the Nation," Politico, June 24, 2024. https://www.politico.com/sponsored/2024/06/body-worn-cameras-build-transparency-and-trust-for-law-enforcement-across-the-nation.
50. Avilucea, "Philadelphia Police body camera footage remains largely unreviewed," Axios, Feb. 27, 2023. https://www.axios.com/2023/02/27/philadelphia-police-body-camera-footage-not-reviewed.
51. "Police Body Camera Policies: Recording Circumstances," Brennan Center for Justice, July 19, 2019. https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/police-body-camera-policies-recording-circumstances.

have an "always on" expectation when responding to calls for service, whereas others leave it to officer discretion, which can lead to crucial moments and interactions being left off the record.[52]

Beyond the questions of when and how cameras must be activated, disputes have also emerged over when—and how much—body camera footage must be released to the public. State laws mandating the release of video in specific situations, such as Colorado's 2020 law requiring full disclosure within 21 days of a police shooting, are intended to provide a measure of predictability.[53] In many cases, however, families of people killed by police sometimes wait months or years to see the footage, which can result in lawsuits and erode the very trust that body cameras were intended to bolster.[54] The intensity of the litigation surrounding body camera video indicates the possibility of a lingering resistance to body camera-related transparency laws.

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Federal Legislation

Although most body camera rules are set at state and local levels, federal lawmakers have also sought to provide resources to local agencies and establish standards for consistency and accountability through targeted legislation. Table 2 below provides a summary of bills recently introduced in the 118th and 119th congressional sessions.

Table 2: Federal Body Camera Legislation

Legislation	Introduced by	Purpose
H.R. 1188: Police CAMERA Act of 2025[55]	Rep. Steve Cohen (D-TN)	Provides grant funding to state and local agencies to purchase body cameras, with requirements for policy development, training, and data management.
H.R. 843: Federal Police Camera and Accountability Act[56]	Del. Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC)	Requires federal law enforcement officers to wear body cameras and use dashboard cameras; mandates public release of footage in cases involving use of force resulting in death or serious injury.
H.R. 9954: Facial Recognition Ban on Body Cameras Act[57]	Rep. Donald S. Beyer (D-VA)	Prohibits federal law enforcement and any state or local agency receiving Byrne JAG grant funding from using facial recognition or other remote biometric surveillance technologies on footage collected by body-worn cameras.

Free-Market Solutions

Unreviewed body camera video remains one of the most underutilized sources of public safety data. However, law enforcement agencies, prosecutors' offices, and even body camera manufacturers themselves have struggled to

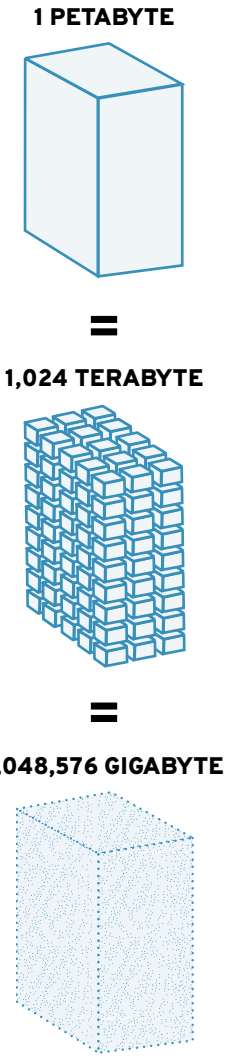
52. Community Oriented Policing Services, "Implementing a Body-Worn Camera Program: Recommendations and Lessons Learned," U.S. Department of Justice, 2014. https://www.justice.gov/iso/opa/resources/472014912134715246869.pdf.
53. "Body-Worn Camera Laws Database," National Conference of State Legislatures, April 30, 2021. https://www.ncsl.org/civil-and-criminal-justice/body-worn-camera-laws-database.
54. Jeffrey A. Roberts, "Colorado court case about disclosure of police body cam footage focuses on when an 'incident' begins and ends," Colorado Freedom of Information Coalition, April 9, 2025. https://coloradofoic.org/colorado-court-case-about-disclosure-of-police-body-cam-footage-focuses-on-when-an-incident-begins-and-ends.
55. "H.R.1188: Police CAMERA Act of 2025," 119th Congress, Feb. 11, 2025. https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-bill/1188.
56. "H.R.843: Federal Police Camera and Accountability Act," 118th Congress, Feb. 6, 2023. https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-bill/843.
57. "H.R.9954: Facial Recognition Ban on Body Cameras Act," 118th Congress, Nov. 11, 2024. https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-bill/9954/text.

find a way to catalog the vast amounts of data the cameras generate.[58] One estimate noted that the body camera manufacturer Axon—whose integrated body camera platform now combines hardware, cloud-based storage, and review tools—hosted more than 100 petabytes (PB) of video on its servers as of 2023.[59] Even body camera programs in smaller police departments create more footage than human processors could watch within a reasonable timeframe.[60]

One of the challenges for justice system officials is that the time needed for a human to review a video does not scale one-to-one with the length of the video. This means that reviewing one hour of footage can take well over an hour because of the pausing, fast-forwarding, rewinding, and note-taking required for a thorough review. Moreover, body cameras sometimes record inside homes, in hospitals, and during sensitive interviews with victims and bystanders. Thus, a single Freedom of Information Act request often requires time-consuming video redaction to maintain victim and witness privacy.[61] Finally, modern community policing demands long stretches of officer time spent out in public, when body cameras are typically turned on, creating even more video to sift through.[62] Fortunately, the private sector is addressing this challenge by developing AI systems that can turn raw video into positive public safety outcomes.

Truleo. Among the private companies tackling the body camera data challenge, Chicago-based startup Truleo stands out for its AI-driven solutions. The platform focuses on audio, rather than video, combining speech recognition with a proprietary large-language model—the same technology that powers ChatGPT—to transcribe, analyze, and identify key moments in a body camera recording.[63] It can also flag unprofessional behavior and generate insights to help supervisors assess their teams' performance and identify areas for improvement. The software can even draft a police report.[64]

The focus on audio allows for a scalable, more objective assessment of police encounters without the influence of visual cues that might introduce implicit bias or civil liberty concerns. Importantly, the software is also able to highlight positive interactions—such as exemplary de-escalation tactics—that regular body camera reviews might miss, creating opportunities to celebrate good policing, share best practices, and foster a culture of

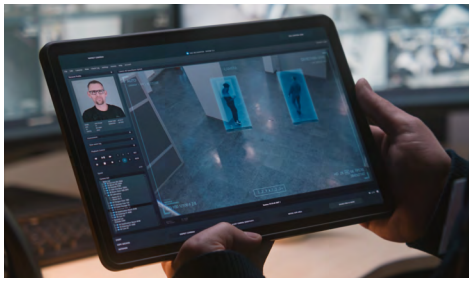


58. Logan Seacrest, "Body Camera Policy Brief," Nebraska Legislative Research Office, April 23, 2019. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5039861dc4aa2c5a0b8748a5/t/67ff06a61658884ee70cd051/1744766631417/Body+Camera+Final.pdf.
59. Umar Farooq, "Police Departments Are Turning to AI to Sift Through Millions of Hours of Unreviewed Body-Cam Footage," ProPublica, Feb. 2, 2024. https://www.propublica.org/article/police-body-cameras-video-ai-law-enforcement.
60. Ibid.
61. Bryce Clayton Newell, "Collateral Visibility: A Socio-Legal Study of Police Body Camera Adoption, Privacy, and Public Disclosure in Washington State," *Indiana Law Journal* 92:4 (Fall 2017), pp. 1329-1399. https://www.repository.law.indiana.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=11260&context=ilj.
62. Office of Justice Programs, "Community Policing Defined," U.S. Department of Justice, 2022. https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/community-policing-defined-0.
63. Logan Seacrest interview with Truleo CTO Tejas Shastry (Zoom), Feb. 5, 2024; "How It Works," Truleo, last accessed April 21, 2025. https://truleo.co/technology.
64. Ibid.

continuous improvement.[65] A representative from Truleo noted that 30 police departments across the country are using the company's AI-based platform to review body camera video.[66] Preliminary findings suggest that it has had positive impacts, including notable increases in officer professionalism.[67]

The startup's focus on language analysis is particularly valuable, as research has shown that officer communication—such as narrating actions clearly or avoiding inflammatory language—can significantly affect citizens' perceptions of fairness, professionalism, and trust.[68] This is notable because four-letter swear words are practically a dialect in law enforcement, used to bond with peers, vent, or emphasize a point.[69] While officers cursing at each other may be harmless, when foul language is used toward the public, especially in a threatening or derogatory way, it erodes legitimacy.[70] Most police executives surveyed agreed: At a minimum, this kind of language deserves scrutiny; in extreme cases, it may warrant discipline.[71]

AI review of body camera footage also raises issues of accuracy, nuance, and context. Misclassification can happen. For instance, AI might flag an officer for using profanity when they were quoting a suspect, or it might misunderstand sarcasm or local slang. There is also a risk that officers could feel even more watched at work than they already do. It is one thing to have your actions reviewed in response to a complaint; it is another to know that every word you say is being evaluated. A number of police unions have already begun to negotiate the terms of AI use, as some evidence suggests that officer perceptions of fairness decline under AI-led review systems.[72] Specifically, a 2025 study found that officers viewed automatic camera activation and AI-based review as significantly less fair than traditional review.[73] Human supervisor review—even when random—was seen as more fair.[74] This suggests that the best path forward may be a hybrid system, where AI flags footage, but a human makes final decisions on what actions to take.



AI review of body camera footage raises issues of accuracy, nuance, and context. Misclassification can happen. For instance, AI might flag an officer for using profanity when they were quoting a suspect, or it might misunderstand sarcasm or local slang.

JusticeText. Law enforcement agencies are not the only groups using body camera footage. Video evidence is now ingrained in the criminal justice system, shaping outcomes for the prosecution and defense alike. More than

65. Ibid.
66. Logan Seacrest interview with Truleo CEO Anthony Tassone (Zoom), March 20, 2025.
67. Michael D. White et al., "Perceptions, Use, and Impact of Truleo in Three Arizona Law Enforcement Agencies," Arnold Venture Innovation Day Conference, Miami Dade College School of Justice, March 20, 2025; Ian T. Adams et al., "State of Research: Truleo, Professionalism, and Impacting Officer Behavior," Arnold Venture Innovation Day Conference, Miami Dade College School of Justice, March 20, 2025.
68. "Legitimacy and Procedural Justice: A New Element of Police Leadership," Police Executive Research Forum, March 2014. https://www.policeforum.org/assets/docs/Free_Online_Documents/Leadership/legitimacy%20and%20procedural%20justice%20-%20a%20new%20element%20of%20police%20leadership.pdf; Richard R. Johnson, "Public Perceptions of Police Profanity," Dolan Consulting Group, April 2018. https://www.dolanconsultinggroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Research-Brief_Public-Perceptions-of-Police-Profanity.pdf.
69. Ian T. Adams, "Fuck: The Police," *Police Quarterly* 28:1 (April 1, 2024). https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/10986111241241750.
70. Ibid.
71. "Legitimacy and Procedural Justice: A New Element of Police Leadership." https://www.policeforum.org/assets/docs/Free_Online_Documents/Leadership/legitimacy%20and%20procedural%20justice%20-%20a%20new%20element%20of%20police%20leadership.pdf.
72. Ian T. Adams, "Automation and Artificial Intelligence in Police Body-Worn Cameras: Experimental Evidence of Impact on Perceptions of Fairness Among Officers," *Journal of Criminal Justice* 97 (March–April 2025). https://www.researchgate.net/publication/378137143_Automation_and_Artificial_Intelligence_in_Police_Body-Worn_Cameras_Experimental_Evidence_of_Impact_on_Perceptions_of_Fairness_Among_Officers.
73. Ibid.
74. Ibid.

80 percent of criminal cases now involve video, meaning attorneys stand to benefit just as much, if not more, from a streamlined body camera workflow.[75] Just as it has overwhelmed police departments, the volume of digital evidence has also overwhelmed many legal offices, creating new burdens and costs in case preparation and public records compliance. In Virginia, for example, a 2018 legislative working group estimated that to process footage, an extra salaried position would need to be added for every 75 body cameras in operation, at a total cost of about $6.4 million a year.[76] These types of resource pressures have spurred private companies to develop AI tools designed to streamline evidence reviews and reduce case backlogs.

In Virginia, a 2018 legislative working group estimated that to process footage, an extra salaried position would need to be added

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JusticeText is a Chicago-based startup applying AI to help under-resourced public defenders sift through video evidence.[77] In the same way that Truleo is designed to support police officers, JusticeText serves as a digital paralegal to help attorneys prepare a defense. The software can turn body camera video into searchable text and flag significant moments, such as arrests or Miranda warnings, for a human to review. It even allows attorneys to ask the system questions using a natural language interface. The system is intended to speed up discovery, reduce pretrial detention, and free up time for humans to focus on defense strategies.[78]

A JusticeText representative noted that 70 public defender offices are now regularly using its software.[79] The software is able to process hours of footage in seconds, looking for coercive methods that can elicit false confessions.[80] It can even flag language indicative of the Reid technique (like false promises of leniency) that some states have banned in juvenile interrogations.[81] According to JusticeText's founders, the speed of AI is particularly valuable during courtroom proceedings. There, trial attorneys have used JusticeText to catch contradictions or critical omissions in witness testimony.[82] While empirical evaluation data on JusticeText is still emerging, anecdotal evidence suggests that attorneys are benefiting. Both the Kentucky Department of Public Advocacy and Harris County Public Defender report that the platform has saved their attorneys hours of work by streamlining pretrial preparation and improving outcomes for clients.[83]

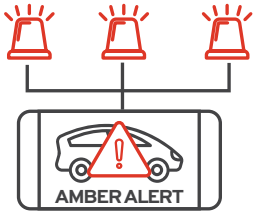
75. Global Justice Information Sharing Initiative, "Video Evidence: A Primer for Prosecutors," Bureau of Justice Assistance, October 2016. https://bja.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh186/files/media/document/final-video-evidence-primer-for-prosecutors.pdf.
76. "Workgroup Study of the Impact of Body Worn Cameras on Workload in Commonwealth's Attorneys' Offices," Virginia Compensation Board, Dec. 1, 2018. https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/boardofsupervisors/sites/boardofsupervisors/files/assets/meeting-materials/2019/jan18-legislative-report-state-body-worn-camera-study.pdf.
77. Megan Morrone, "Putting AI to work for public defenders," Axios, Nov. 8, 2024. https://www.axios.com/2024/11/08/ai-justicetext-public-defenders-tool.
78. "JusticeText AI: The key to a fairer—and safer—criminal justice system?," Stand Together, last accessed April 17, 2025. https://standtogether.org/stories/criminal-justice/could-ai-solve-biggest-problem-right-attorney.
79. Logan Seacrest interview with Truleo CEO Devshi Mehrotra (Zoom), April 17, 2025.
80. Douglas Starr, "In the 'Making a Murderer' Case, the Supreme Court Could Help Address the Problem of False Confessions," *The New Yorker*, June 6, 2018. https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/in-the-making-a-murderer-case-the-supreme-court-could-help-address-the-problem-of-false-confessions.
81. "Illinois Becomes First State to Ban Police Lying to Youth During Interrogations," Innocence Project, July 15, 2021. https://innocenceproject.org/news/illinois-first-state-to-ban-police-lying.
82. Ibid.
83. "JusticeText rolls out AI-powered bodycam transcription for Kentucky public defenders," JusticeText, April 10, 2024. https://justicetext.com/kentucky-dpa; "JusticeText launches video evidence management software for the Harris County Public Defender's Office," JusticeText, March 4, 2022. https://justicetext.com/harris-county-pdo.

FUTURE: Designing a Responsible Future for AI Use in Law Enforcement

In the future, body cameras will go from passive recording devices to active assets in real-time policing decisions. Emerging technologies, such as augmented-reality displays, satellite surveillance, and even autonomous robots, could one day provide officers with situational awareness that far exceeds today's capabilities. As these technologies mature, careful consideration must be given to align them with democratic values. This section explores the future of AI-enhanced body cameras, the promise of predictive technologies, and the risks they pose to civil liberties.

Real-Time Decision-Making

As body cameras become increasingly connected to a broader network of public cameras, real-time analysis will reshape how officers respond in the field. One of the clearest manifestations of this shift in policing is the real-time crime center (RTCC), a centralized command post where live video feeds, sensor data, and emergency calls converge to create a constantly updating picture of a city.[84] On a giant screen, an officer's body camera feed might appear alongside traffic camera footage, private security CCTV, license plate reader alerts, and social media posts.[85] AI will unlock the ability to integrate data from disparate sources that were previously siloed, providing law enforcement with unprecedented insights that can immediately help inform decisions.[86]



Given the proper regulatory framework, the possibilities for this technology are endless. An agentic AI could theoretically access every police dashboard and body camera in a given area to locate a vehicle linked to an Amber Alert.

Given the proper regulatory framework, the possibilities for this technology are wide-ranging. An agentic AI could theoretically access every police dashboard and body camera in a given area to locate a vehicle linked to an Amber Alert. Or it could use natural language to detect signs of escalating conflict before it erupts, pinging violence interrupters to intervene and allowing for community-based de-escalation before law enforcement is involved.[87] AI has the potential to detect concealed weapons, recognize aggressive body language, or flag emotional distress or dishonesty.[88] In a threatening situation, even a simple automated reminder to de-escalate—"slow down, let them speak"—can be helpful. Some companies are now testing "AI partner" services that monitor live body camera feeds and offer contextual prompts to the officers, such as reminders to adhere to a relevant department procedure.[89]

84. Fritz Reber and Jamie Hudson, "The need for speed: How real-time policing tools are transforming emergency response," Police1, Jan. 15, 2025. https://www.police1.com/drones/the-need-for-speed-how-real-time-policing-tools-are-transforming-emergency-response.
85. Philip Lukens, "An introduction to how AI is transforming real time crime centers," Police 1, March 11, 2024. https://www.police1.com/tech-pulse/an-introduction-to-how-ai-is-transforming-real-time-crime-centers.
86. Amanda Davies and Ghaleb Krame, "Integrating body-worn cameras, drones, and AI: A framework for enhancing police readiness and response," *Policing* 17 (Dec. 13, 2023). https://academic.oup.com/policing/article/doi/10.1093/police/paad083/7471863.
87. Logan Seacrest, "Intervention over Incarceration: A Limited Government Approach to Youth Violence," R Street Institute, June 25, 2024. https://www.rstreet.org/research/intervention-over-incarceration-a-limited-government-approach-to-youth-violence.
88. Rohit Kumar Tiwari and Gyanendra K. Verma, "A Computer Vision based Framework for Visual Gun Detection Using Harris Interest Point Detector," *Procedia Computer Science* 54 (2015), pp. 703-712. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1877050915014076; Jessica Hamzelou, "AI Lie Detectors Are Better Than Humans at Spotting Lies," MIT Technology Review, July 5, 2024. https://www.technologyreview.com/2024/07/05/1094703/ai-lie-detectors-are-better-than-humans-at-spotting-lies.
89. "OpenAI Approves TRULEO's Use Case: AI-powered police officer assistant," Police 1, Jan. 22, 2025. https://www.police1.com/police-products/body-cameras/openai-approves-truleos-use-case-ai-powered-police-officer-assistant.

As these types of tools continue to evolve, body cameras will likely do more than simply document what happened—they could shape how officers respond in real time.

Rather than simply documenting crimes after they occur, AI systems are beginning to alert first responders to early warning signs before violence breaks out.

Predictive Policing

Advances in AI are beginning to shift policing from a reactive to a more proactive model. Rather than simply documenting crimes after they occur, AI systems are beginning to alert first responders to early warning signs before violence breaks out. For example, some tools can detect subtle, irregular body language, like a person pacing outside of a school with a heavy bag.[90] Others analyze social media activity to identify escalating gang conflicts or signs of mental health crises, giving authorities the chance to intervene or connect people to services before situations turn violent.

As body cameras are increasingly integrated into larger surveillance networks, they will evolve from standalone, passive recording devices to nodes in a smart network of connected law enforcement tools.[91] Feeds from public and private cameras—everything from traffic cameras to doorbell cameras—will combine with body camera feeds to offer police 360-degree coverage of a neighborhood or even an entire city. With the help of AI, these networks will be able to operate continuously, day and night. Cities like Chicago and New York have already linked thousands of cameras to gunshot detection systems and license plate databases.[92] Other cities, including Tulsa and Nashville, have begun to integrate live feeds from privately owned cameras into their police department networks.[93]

While pop culture depictions of predictive policing, such as *Minority Report's* "Precrime Division," serve as a warning, real-world tools are more often used to prevent harm rather than make arrests.[94] In 2023, for example, Santa Monica police received a report of a man brandishing a weapon in a parking lot and deployed a drone to investigate.[95] Although the live aerial footage initially seemed to show a firearm, closer inspection showed that the suspect was actually flicking a lighter. This real-time intel enabled police to switch tactics and avoid a potentially deadly mistake.[96]

90. Dominic Preston, "New York City Wants Subway Cameras to Predict 'Trouble' Before It Happens," The Verge, April 30, 2025. https://www.theverge.com/news/658524/mta-ai-predictive-crime-new-york-subway-platforms.
91. Metro Nashville Community Oversight Board. *FUSUS Informational Report*. Nashville.gov, October 2023. https://www.nashville.gov/sites/default/files/2023-10/MNCO-FUSUS-Informational-Report-ADA.pdf
92. "ShotSpotter Announces Expansion to Seven New U.S. Cities," SoundThinking, Sept. 19, 2017. https://www.soundthinking.com/press-releases/shotspotter-announces-expansion-to-seven-new-u-s-cities.
93. Rian Stockett, "Tulsa police seek business partnerships to enhance crime response with live camera feeds," KTUL News, March 12, 2025. https://ktul.com/news/local/tulsa-police-seek-business-partnerships-to-enhance-crime-response-with-live-camera-feeds-security-footage-information-center-real-time-oklahoma-owners-theives-police-department.
94. Philip K. Dick, "The Minority Report," Gollancz, 2000 (originally published 1956).
95. Lawrence Hodge, "Santa Monica Police Are Using Drones As First Responders," Jalopnik, July 5, 2023. https://www.jalopnik.com/california-police-drones-emergency-first-responders-1850607124.
96. Ibid.

Despite these benefits, however, predictive systems can also open the door to invasive surveillance, and without clear and enforceable policies to protect civil liberties, these tools could be abused by bad actors. Thus, as law enforcement shifts toward a more interconnected public–private security feed, robust civilian oversight and civil liberty protections become even more critical.

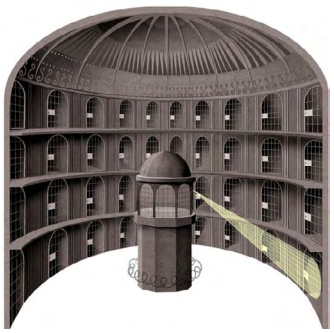
WHEN THE CAMERA GETS IT WRONG

On a chilly morning in January 2020, 25-year-old Michael Celestine stepped out of his friend's house in New Orleans. Wearing a white Tommy Hilfiger puffer jacket, he spoke briefly with a friend, smoked a cigarette, and then went back inside—all of which took less than 15 minutes. What Celestine didn't realize was that, a mile away, the New Orleans Police Department was observing and recording his actions from the city's Real Time Crime Center.[97] The officer reviewing the footage deemed Celestine "suspicious," and a nearby patrol car responded. Released body camera video shows Celestine being chased down, tased, and arrested. He spent more than a year in custody before his criminal charges were ultimately dismissed.[98] The American Civil Liberties Union later sued the NOPD for making a false arrest based on insufficient evidence, and the case was settled in Celestine's favor.[99]

A Digital Panopticon

The 18th-century British philosopher Jeremy Bentham envisioned a prison design called a "Panopticon"—a blueprint for perfect surveillance and control (an idea George Orwell borrowed for his dystopian novel, 1984).[100] He considered his design to be promising because of the psychological effect it created: If people believe they might always be watched, they behave as though they are. Today, the concept of a digital panopticon has moved from theory to reality, as the combination of urban camera networks and agentic AI promises to give government authorities capabilities Bentham could only imagine.

China has come closer than any other nation to creating a true digital panopticon. Drawing on its vast network of CCTV cameras, the country's authorities are using homegrown AI models like DeepSeek to harvest



BY: Blue Ākāśha

97. City of New Orleans, "Real Time Crime Center," Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness, last accessed July 2024. https://nola.gov/next/homeland-security/topics/real-time-crime-center-en.
98. Ibid.
99. "ACLU Settles Lawsuit for Mr. Michael Celestine, a Black Man Who Was Racially Profiled, Attacked, and Unlawfully Jailed by New Orleans Police Officers," ACLU Louisiana, Feb. 2, 2023. https://www.laaclu.org/en/press-releases/aclu-settles-lawsuit-mr-michael-celestine-black-man-who-was-racially-profiled.
100. Janet Semple, *Bentham's Prison: A Study of the Panopticon Penitentiary,* (Oxford University Press, 1993) pp. 20-41. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198273875.003.0002; George Orwell, *1984* (Secker & Warburg, 1949).

social media data and compile detailed citizen profiles.[101] Alarmingly, these surveillance tools are now being exported to other countries through firms like Huawei and Yitu, raising global concerns about the proliferation of powerful surveillance technologies.[102] In Western democracies, the shift from systems that watch to systems that act and decide has outpaced legislative oversight.[103] Predictive policing programs in Los Angeles and New Orleans have already drawn criticism, and facial recognition firms, like Clearview AI, have scraped billions of images from the internet to build one of the most powerful biometric identification systems in history.[104]

A world where anyone can be tracked at any time, anywhere, fundamentally shifts the balance of power between government and citizens.[105] Even companies like Axon have paused plans to integrate facial recognition into body camera systems until accuracy and fairness issues can be resolved.[106] As AI capabilities continue to advance—both in ways we can imagine and in ways we cannot—striking a balance between public safety and civil liberties will require ongoing vigilance from policymakers, industry, and the public.

A world where anyone can be tracked at any time, anywhere, fundamentally shifts the balance of power between government and citizens.

Smart Technology Requires Smart Policy

The infrastructure for the future described in this paper is no longer theoretical—it already exists. Whether these tools will protect the public or erode our freedoms will depend on our ability to merge AI capabilities with effective human oversight. Policymakers must therefore prepare for a not-so-distant future in which AI will move beyond transcribing videos to actively assisting with investigations.

As with any new government power, human decisions—not technology—will ultimately determine the outcome. Some jurisdictions are moving to restrict the use of AI in certain circumstances. In 2022, New Orleans prohibited the use of facial recognition in law enforcement except in violent felony cases. However, some experts argue that total bans go too far, and several states that initially restricted certain uses of AI are now reconsidering.[107] Rather than stifling innovation, policymakers should allow experimentation to

101. "DeepSeek Unmasked: Exposing the CCP's Latest Tool for Spying, Stealing, and Subverting U.S. Export Control Restrictions," House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party, April 2025. https://selectcommitteeontheccp.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/selectcommitteeontheccp.house.gov/files/evo-media-document/DeepSeek%20Final.pdf.
102. Steven Feldstein, "The Global Expansion of AI Surveillance," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Sept. 17, 2019. https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/09/17/global-expansion-of-ai-surveillance-pub-79847; Abi Olvera, "How AI surveillance threatens democracy everywhere," Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, June 7, 2024. https://thebulletin.org/2024/06/how-ai-surveillance-threatens-democracy-everywhere.
103. Abi Olvera, "How AI surveillance threatens democracy everywhere," Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, June 7, 2024. https://thebulletin.org/2024/06/how-ai-surveillance-threatens-democracy-everywhere.
104. Ilica MahajanMicah Loewinger, "The High-Tech Tools Police Can Use to Surveil Protesters," The Marshall Project, Nov. 12, 2024. https://www.themarshallproject.org/2024/11/12/protest-surveillance-technologies; Kashmir Hill, *Your Face Belongs to Us: A Tale of AI, a Secretive Startup, and the End of Privacy*, (Penguin Press, 2024). https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/691288/your-face-belongs-to-us-by-kashmir-hill.
105. Manuel G. Pascual, "Kashmir Hill: 'They shouldn't be collecting photos from social media without people's consent, but they keep doing it and nobody's stopping them,'" *El País*, April 27, 2024. https://english.elpais.com/technology/2024-04-28/kashmir-hill-they-shouldnt-be-collecting-photos-from-social-media-without-peoples-consent-but-they-keep-doing-it-and-nobodys-stopping-them.html.
106. "Responding to Call from Ethics Board, Leading Producer of Police Body Cameras Agrees to Keep Face Recognition Off Its Products," Policing Project, June 27, 2019. https://www.policingproject.org/axon-press-release#:~:text=6,it%20into%20body%20cameras.
107. Rachel Metz, "First, they banned facial recognition. Now they're not so sure," CNN, Aug. 5, 2022. https://www.cnn.com/2022/08/05/tech/facial-recognition-bans-reversed/index.html.

flourish within clear boundaries—encouraging innovation while setting rules around access, transparency, and due process.

The following recommendations offer concrete ways for agencies and governments to strike this balance at every level.

Recommendations for Law Enforcement Agencies, Prosecutors, and Public Defenders

Adopt use policies and enforce them consistently. Body cameras and AI should come with guidelines on use and misuse. For example, agencies should require officers to activate body cameras during all enforcement-related encounters, with rare exceptions. Agencies should set firm consequences if officers do not record when required, including disciplinary actions for repeat violations.

Require human approval for real-time body camera facial recognition. Any use of facial recognition or real-time analysis of body camera video should require a reasonable suspicion, if not a warrant. Any possible match should be treated only as a lead, not as an automatic identification, and followed by human verification.

Incorporate privacy safeguards. Set rules about data governance, live feeds, and evidence retention. Develop protocols to pause recording or AI analysis during sensitive moments, such as medical exams.

Engage officers in training and policy development. Roll out new technologies gradually, listening to officer concerns and adjusting policies when appropriate. Involving frontline officers and union representatives when updating body-camera or AI policies can help achieve buy-in. Training officers in AI systems will help them use these powerful tools in ways that reinforce professionalism, procedural justice, and human dignity.

Pair technology with human oversight. AI analytics, such as automated transcription or video labeling, should assist—not replace—human review. Any AI system should be based on a "human-in-the-loop" model, with a team of law enforcement professionals, attorneys, and software engineers providing supervision. Final decisions about arrests, discipline, or case strategy, must remain in human hands.

Use data responsibly and guard against overreach. Unless required because of a formal complaint or specific investigative need, agencies should prohibit the use of archived footage to pursue minor infractions. Unwarranted fishing expeditions (e.g., combing through old videos to discipline officers or civilians for minor transgressions) risk discrediting AI in the eyes of the public and the police.

Ensure prompt and equal access to body camera evidence. Establish protocols so that all body camera footage relevant to a case is made available to both prosecutors and defense attorneys as early as possible. Ideally, provide copies of footage to defense counsel within a day or two of an arrest or incident, giving both sides adequate review time.

Invest in tools and training to manage digital evidence. Advocate for funding to accommodate the added workload that ubiquitous cameras create, including AI-assisted video transcription services and similar tools to speed up review and shorten pretrial detentions. Provide training so prosecutors and public defenders can effectively navigate, interpret, and present video evidence and better understand the limitations of video evidence and AI review.

Recommendations for Local and State Policymakers

Set statewide standards for body camera use and data management. Enact legislation that all law enforcement agencies in the state must follow regarding camera activation, recording protocols, data retention, and public disclosure. Legislation should set minimum requirements, allowing agencies to go further if they so choose.

Create rules for public release and access. State law should stipulate when and how body camera footage is released to the public. Absent a compelling legal rationale, footage of officer-involved shootings and serious use-of-force incidents should be released to the public within a reasonable timeframe. At a minimum, individuals or families of individuals who have been impacted by officer misconduct should have a right to view the footage within a reasonable timeframe. Exceptions, such as videos of sexual assault or child abuse victims, may be exempted from public release or only shown to those in the video.

Establish oversight mechanisms. Citizens need to know if and when AI is being used to drive important policing decisions. Independent oversight by a civilian review board, inspector general, or ombudsman should be prioritized, rather than leaving oversight solely to police discretion.

Collect and release data. Communities deserve to know how they are being policed, and states should require agencies to regularly collect and report body camera metrics—for example, how much footage is being collected and how it is being used. AI algorithms must be regularly benchmarked for accuracy and open to review by independent auditors.

Protect civil liberties and public access. Body cameras should be prohibited from monitoring constitutionally protected activities (like peaceful protests or political gatherings), unless they are being used for crowd control or to investigate unlawful conduct. Cap what agencies can charge for copies of footage so they cannot use a paywall to keep the public from viewing data they own.

Invest in law enforcement AI applications. Allocate funding not just to buy cameras but also to cover data storage costs, maintenance, and officer training. Provide financial incentives for ambitious public safety innovations, such as automated video review or the integration of body cameras with other visual surveillance, but condition this support on the development of written guidelines. Let different agencies innovate and experiment, and scale up initiatives that prove successful in the field.

New training standards. Expand state police officer certification standards to include training on body cameras, AI software, digital evidence handling, and constitutional law.

Recommendations for Federal Policymakers

Establish national standards on body camera AI. The Department of Justice should convene police leaders, civil rights advocates, and technologists to develop a set of model national guidelines for body camera use. These should cover minimum policies on activation, facial recognition, real-time streaming, data storage, public release, and restrictions on surveillance.

Use federal funding to incentivize evidence-based practices. Tie federal law enforcement funding to robust body camera standards. For example, Bureau of Justice Assistance body camera grants should require recipient agencies to have a minimum baseline of body camera policy in place.

Mandate that federal agents wear cameras. As of 2022, DOJ policy is for federal agents serving arrest warrants or executing raids to wear body cameras. This should be codified and expanded. Federal law enforcement should adopt individualized body camera policies for public operations, and federal agents participating in joint task forces should be subject to the same body camera and evidence-sharing policies as their local counterparts.

Cultivate public/private partnerships. Compared to the private sector, government agencies generally have poor technological capabilities. Federal lawmakers can make government procurement more conducive to early-stage innovation by streamlining acquisition processes, funding pilot programs, and implementing results-based contracting.

Invest in research and development. Open, interoperable AI systems that assist in reviewing footage or redacting private information will help make body camera data more manageable. Require that any tools developed with federal support be tested for bias, accuracy, and privacy safeguards before deployment.

Study the effects of AI on the justice system. Allocate federal research dollars (through the National Institute of Justice, National Science Foundation, etc.) to study the impacts of body cameras and AI on criminal justice outcomes. A national clearinghouse for law enforcement AI policy and technical assistance programs can accelerate the spread of effective practices without each jurisdiction having to reinvent the wheel.

Conclusion

Body cameras have reshaped the relationship between citizens and the government, sparking debates around transparency, accountability, and public trust. Yet their potential has been constrained by technical limitations and inconsistent policy. AI may be the missing link, given its ability to convert vast stores of data into actionable insights and reduce the burden of manual reviews. When used appropriately, it can reduce administrative burdens and help officers focus on serving communities with empathy and professionalism. Unlocking the potential of these tools requires more than smart software—it demands smart policy. The future of body cameras will be shaped not by what the technology can do, but by the values we embed in the rules that govern it.

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Appendix: Notable State Body-Worn Camera Legislation

State	Bill #	Year Introduced	Summary	Status*
Alabama†	HB 289	2023	Establishes procedures for disclosing or releasing recordings made by BWC or dashboard cameras used by law enforcement agencies.	Enacted
Alaska†	HB 281	2022	Provides appropriations of $3.58 million in state funding and $938,000 in federal funding to the Alaska Department of Public Safety to support BWC program deployment.	Passed
Arizona†	SB 1148	2024	Allows law enforcement agencies to charge up to $46 per hour for reviewing and redacting BWC footage when responding to public records requests.	Enacted
Arkansas†	HB 1219	2025	Mandates law enforcement agencies and public entities employing law enforcement officers to provide BWCs and record interactions with the public.	Withdrawn by Author
California†	SB 691	2025	Requires law enforcement agencies to update their BWC policies by July 1, 2026, to include procedures for stopping recording upon request during medical or psychological evaluations.	Pending
Colorado‡	SB 217	2020	Creates inferences, presumptions, and sanctions for failing to activate or for tampering with a BWC. Requires all recordings of an incident be released to the public within 21 days after the local law enforcement agency or Colorado state patrol receives a complaint of misconduct.	Enacted
Connecticut‡	HB 5381	2025	Clarifies under which circumstances an officer shall not pause BWC equipment.	Enacted
Delaware‡	HB 206	2023	Amends various titles relating to the Police Officer Standards and Training Commission, including provisions for BWCs.	Enacted
District of Columbia†	Bill 24-0320	2023	Provides comprehensive policing and justice reform including increasing access to BWC footage.	Died in chamber
Florida†	HB 569	2021	Mandates that law enforcement agencies require officers to wear and use BWC in certain circumstances.	Died in subcommittee
Georgia†	HB 325	2023	Requires all uniformed peace officers to wear and use BWC by July 1, 2025; establishes guidelines for use and technical standards.	Died in committee
Hawaii†	HB 1573	2022	Requires officers serving a warrant issued by a district court to do so while wearing an authorized uniform and using a BWC.	Died in committee
Idaho†	HB 205	2021	Provides an appropriation of $964,000 for law enforcement to support frontline personnel at the Idaho State Police (ISP), including new BWC for ISP detectives and ISP troopers assigned to Capitol Protective Services.	Enacted
Illinois‡	HB 3524	2025	Amends the Law Enforcement Officer-Worn Body Camera Act to include a provision allowing executive branch constitutional officers to request that BWCs be turned off during interactions with their assigned security detail.	Died in committee
Indiana†	HB 1284	2021	Requires local law enforcement agencies and certain state law enforcement agencies to provide, maintain, and use BWCs and onboard recorders. Requires the law enforcement training board to adopt rules governing the use and maintenance of body cameras and onboard recorders by local law enforcement agencies and certain state law enforcement agencies.	Died in committee

State	Bill #	Year Introduced	Summary	Status*
Iowa§	HB 43	2021	Requires certain peace officers, including tribal law enforcement officers, to wear and use a BWC. It also provides remedies.	Died in committee
Kansas†	SB 198	2021	Amends Kansas Open Records Act provisions regarding access to certain law enforcement audio and video recordings and enacting the Police and Citizen Protection Act regarding the use of BWC by law enforcement officers.	Died in committee
Kentucky†	HB 144	2023	Creates a new section of KRS Chapter 15 to define terms; requires law enforcement to utilize BWC and audio devices while on private open land; provides exceptions.	Passed; became law without Governor's signature
Louisiana†	HB 470	2021	Amends Louisiana's public records law to clarify the conditions under which BWC and other law enforcement video/audio footage may be exempt from disclosure when it violates an individual's reasonable expectation of privacy.	Dead; withdrawn
Maine†	SB 636	2019	Establishes a working group to study the use of BWCs by law enforcement officers in the state.	Died in chamber
Maryland‡	HB 669	2025	Establishes comprehensive requirements for BWCs used by law enforcement officers in Maryland to increase transparency and accountability. Mandates that recordings can be used as evidence in various proceedings and sets strict guidelines for when officers must activate and deactivate their BWCs.	Died in committee
Massachusetts†	HB 1992	2025	Amends existing law by allowing police officers to access and view BWC footage of an incident before making a formal statement about it. It reverses a prior requirement that prohibited such access before giving a statement.	Pending
Michigan†	HB 5019	2021	Requires uniformed law enforcement officers in Michigan to wear BWCs and continuously record interactions while on duty, with specific exceptions for privacy and personal matters. Also establishes clear policies for data retention, limits facial recognition use without a warrant, creates presumptions in court when footage is unavailable, and mandates state reimbursement to local agencies for implementation costs.	Died in committee
Minnesota†	HF1354	2025	Amends existing law to limit the scope of BWC and related video footage made publicly available by the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension following officer-involved death investigations. It clarifies that only video specifically documenting the actions and circumstances surrounding the death must be released and delays public posting until after all related criminal appeals are resolved.	Died in committee
Mississippi§	HB 707	2025	Requires cities and counties in the state to provide BWCs to police officers and deputy sheriffs who are on patrol, with specific provisions to ensure compliance. Mandates that police officers and deputy sheriffs wear these cameras while on patrol and establishes penalties for noncompliance.	Died in committee
Missouri†	HB 257	2025	Requires all peace officers in the state to wear BWCs while on duty. Recordings must be retained for at least 60 days and made publicly accessible within 14 days of an incident.	Died in committee

State	Bill #	Year Introduced	Summary	Status*
Montana†	SB 259	2025	Includes a provision requiring that if BWC footage is used during the removal of a child from their home, law enforcement must provide copies of the footage to both the judge and the family to demonstrate that delaying removal would have endangered the child.	Died in committee
Nebraska†	LB 557	2021	Updates Nebraska's BWC statute by requiring law enforcement agencies to implement policies governing BWC use, including mandatory officer training, retention of footage for at least 90 days (with longer retention in specific legal circumstances), and procedures for footage disposal. It also designates BWC footage of deaths involving law enforcement as public record once grand jury proceedings have concluded.	Died in chamber
Nevada‡	AB 131	2021	Expands Nevada's BWC requirements to mandate that any peace officer in uniform and on duty with potential public interaction must wear and activate a BWC during law enforcement encounters. It also outlines policies for activation, retention (minimum 15 days), restricted access to recordings, and disciplinary actions for misuse.	Failed
New Hampshire†	SB 362	2023	Directs the New Hampshire Law Enforcement Accreditation Commission to submit a report by Nov. 1, 2024, identifying legal and privacy issues related to the copying, distribution, and use of BWC footage. Among other things, the report will address concerns involving investigative methods, individual privacy rights, and public access under the state's right-to-know laws.	Enacted
New Jersey‡	SB 1500	2024	Expands the state's BWC requirements by mandating that operational detectives—non-uniformed officers engaged in fieldwork—also wear BWCs while on patrol, regardless of funding limitations. It also modifies existing law by adding and removing certain exemptions to camera use, allows concealed cameras for detectives, clarifies deactivation rules, and strengthens retention and access policies, including limiting when officers can review footage before filing reports.	Pending
New Mexico‡	SB 505	2025	Amends existing New Mexico law to strengthen requirements for law enforcement BWC use. Mandates that law enforcement agencies require peace officers who routinely interact with the public to wear BWCs while on duty, with specific exceptions. Establishes policies requiring officers to activate cameras at the start of any public interaction, prohibiting camera deactivation during encounters, and requiring retention of recordings for at least 120 days. Strengthens language related to disciplinary actions, making it clear that officers who fail to comply with BWC policies will be presumed to have acted in bad faith and can be held liable for evidence spoliation.	Died in committee
New York‡	A017176	2025	Modifies existing laws to enhance the discoverability of recordings from police BWC and vehicle cameras in legal proceedings. Amends the civil practice law and rules and the criminal procedure law to require full disclosure of all recordings made or received by police BWCs and vehicle cameras during potential criminal incidents. Mandates that prosecutors must disclose these recordings to defendants, with some practical limitations. Defendants then have the right to request the additional recordings, which the prosecution must provide within 15 calendar days.	Died in committee

State	Bill #	Year Introduced	Summary	Status*
North Carolina†	HB 804	2023	Requires most state and local law enforcement officers to wear and activate BWCs during public interactions, sets rules for activation and deactivation, and establishes policies for footage retention and public access. It also appropriates grant funding to support BWC equipment purchases and mandates the development of standardized operational and disciplinary guidelines for noncompliance.	Died in committee
North Dakota†	HB 1264	2015	Exempts BWC footage taken by law enforcement officers or firefighters in private places from the state's open records requirements. Limits public access to such recordings to protect the privacy of individuals recorded in non-public settings.	Enacted
Ohio†	HB 315	2023	Includes provisions that require any law enforcement agency using BWCs to adopt and make publicly available policies for the retention and release of BWC footage. These policies must address how long footage is stored, who can access it, and under what circumstances it must be disclosed, particularly in relation to public records requests and criminal justice proceedings.	Enacted
Oklahoma†	HB 3598	2024	Requires all state law enforcement agencies using body-worn, vehicle-mounted, or fixed security cameras to establish written policies on their proper use, maintenance, storage, and public release. Mandates that officers be trained on these policies, allows officers to review footage before writing reports, and ensures compliance with the Oklahoma Open Records Act.	Died in committee
Oregon†	HB 3718	2025	Prohibits police officers involved in deadly use-of-force incidents from reviewing BWC footage before participating in official interviews. Establishes a new court process for the public to appeal denials of access to such footage and directs the Department of Public Safety Standards and Training to develop statewide technical standards for storing and maintaining BWC recordings.	Pending
Pennsylvania†	HR 113	2023	Directs the Joint State Government Commission to study how BWC footage can be more effectively used to ensure safety and justice for law enforcement officers and civilians.	Passed
Rhode Island†	HB 6438	2021	Establishes a statewide BWC program to support the adoption and standardized use of body cameras. It authorizes funding through grants, directs the Department of Public Safety and Attorney General to develop uniform rules and guidelines—including policies on activation, privacy, data access, and retention—and requires annual reporting on program implementation.	Enacted
South Carolina‡	HB 3049	2021	Requires all law enforcement agencies in South Carolina to equip officers with BWCs and outlines strict policies for their activation, retention, and public release—especially following incidents of alleged misconduct.	Died in committee
South Dakota†	SB 100	2020	Establishes standards for the use of BWCs by law enforcement officers, requiring activation during public interactions and setting rules for data retention and public access. Prohibits the use of facial recognition technology with BWC footage and mandates that agencies adopt clear, publicly accessible policies governing use, storage, and privacy protections.	Died in chamber

State	Bill #	Year Introduced	Summary	Status*
Tennessee†	HB 741	2025	Establishes statewide standards for law enforcement agencies that use BWCs, requiring written policies covering activation, deactivation, retention, and public access. Provides privacy protections for victims and private citizens, mandates training for officers, and creates legal consequences—including evidentiary presumptions and disciplinary action—for violations of camera usage or tampering with footage.	Failed
Texas†	SB 219	2023	Strengthens transparency and accountability in law enforcement by requiring agencies to adopt a model policy on use of force and reform BWC procedures. Mandates that individuals depicted in BWC footage involving deadly force be allowed to view the footage upon request, prioritizes public release to oversight entities and involved parties, and removes the provision allowing officers to review footage before making an official statement.	Died in committee
Utah‡	HB 339	2025	Exempts law enforcement officers assigned to narcotics units, task forces, or undercover operations from certain BWC activation and use requirements.	Signed into law
Vermont†	SB 219	2020	Requires that every law enforcement officer in the Department of Public Safety who exercises police powers be equipped with a BWC or other video recording device.	Enacted
Virginia†	HB 246	2020	Requires any local law enforcement agency to adopt a written policy before purchasing or deploying a BWC system. The policy must follow best practices, be consistent with state law, and be made publicly available for review and comment before adoption, using guidance from the model policy established by the Department of Criminal Justice Services.	Passed
Washington†	SB 5187	2023	Provides an appropriation of $1,030,000 in fiscal year 2024 and $1,030,000 in fiscal year 2025 specifically for law enforcement audits under RCW 43.101.460 and 43.101.465, which include reviews of BWC practices.	Passed
West Virginia†	SB 821	2025	Requires Child Protective Services (CPS) workers to attempt to use BWCs during child abuse or neglect investigations, provided they obtain consent from the subject being investigated. It allows CPS workers to refrain from using BWCs if doing so would compromise a child's privacy or hinder the investigation and mandates that any resulting audio/video be stored for the duration of the open case as part of the confidential child welfare record.	Died in committee
Wisconsin†	SB 789	2023	Authorizes law enforcement and corrections agencies to charge fees for the actual, necessary, and direct cost of redacting video content (such as from BWCs) when responding to public records requests.	Passed
Wyoming†	SB 32	2017	Defines "peace officer recordings" as audio or video captured by officers on body-worn or vehicle-mounted cameras during official duties, and limits public access to such footage under the state's public records laws. Restricts the inspection of these recordings unless granted by law, court order, or specific exceptions such as incidents involving deadly force, serious bodily injury, complaints against officers, or concerns related to public safety.	Passed

BWC, body-worn camera.

* Status as of July 1, 2025

† No state-wide mandate for all law-enforcement officers, but the state has adopted some legislation regulating the use and/or disclosure of BWCs

‡ Mandated state-wide BWC adoption for all police agencies

§ No state policy regarding the use and/or disclosure of BWCs, including no requirement that departments use BWCs and no policies around the use of BWCs or the data they capture