

## **Civil Rights, Privacy, and Media Rights Groups Release Principles for Law Enforcement Body Worn Cameras**

### **For Immediate Release**

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May 15, 2015

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WASHINGTON –Today, a broad coalition of civil rights, privacy, and media rights organizations released shared civil rights principles for the use of body worn cameras by law enforcement.

As body worn cameras come into greater use by law enforcement across the country, the signers are urging police departments to follow certain principles to ensure that the cameras are a tool of public accountability and transparency. Video footage that documents law enforcement interactions with the public — whether gathered through body worn cameras or citizen video of police activities — can have a valuable role to play in the present and future of policing. At the same time, the arrival of new video equipment does not guarantee that a police agency will better protect the civil rights of the community it serves.

In the principles, the groups underscore that body worn cameras are not a substitute for broader policing reforms and, when deployed without appropriate safeguards, can even compound problems of over-surveillance and biased policing.

To ensure mobile cameras are used to help eradicate discriminatory policing and protect civil rights, the groups are calling for camera policies to be developed publicly and to make sure that certain footage is made available to the public and the press. The groups also say that police departments must commit to a set of well-defined purposes for camera use, and need to specify clear operational policies for recording, retention, and access.

“These guidelines can help ensure that cameras are tools for accountability—not instruments of injustice,” said Wade Henderson, president and CEO of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights. “Without fair and transparent standards for the use of body worn cameras, police departments risk exacerbating the problems they are seeking to fix.”

The statement of principles and a full list of signing organizations are below:

### **Civil Rights Principles on Body Worn Cameras**

**May 2015**

Mobile cameras operated by law enforcement may play a valuable role in the present and future of policing. Whether they're worn by an officer or mounted on police equipment, cameras could help provide transparency into law enforcement practices, by providing first-hand evidence of public interactions.

But police-operated cameras are no substitute for broader reforms of policing practices. In fact, cameras could be used to intensify disproportionate surveillance and enforcement in heavily policed communities of color. Without carefully crafted policy safeguards in place, there is a real risk that these new devices could become instruments of injustice, rather than tools for accountability.

To help ensure that police-operated cameras are used to enhance civil rights, departments must:

1. **Develop camera policies in public** with the input of civil rights advocates and the local community. Current policies must always be publicly available, and any policy changes must also be made in consultation with the community.
2. **Commit to a set of narrow and well-defined purposes** for which cameras and their footage may be used. In particular, facial recognition and other biometric technologies must be carefully limited: if they are used together with body cameras, officers will have far greater visibility into heavily policed communities—where cameras will be abundant—than into other communities where cameras will be rare. Such technologies could amplify existing disparities in law enforcement practices across communities.
3. **Specify clear operational policies for recording, retention, and access**, and enforce strict disciplinary protocols for policy violations. While some types of law enforcement interactions (e.g., when attending to victims of domestic violence) may happen off-camera, the vast majority of interactions with the public—including all that involve the use of force—should be captured on video. Departments must also adopt systems to monitor and audit access to recorded footage, and secure footage against unauthorized access and tampering.
4. **Make footage available to promote accountability** with appropriate privacy safeguards in place. At a minimum: (1) footage that captures police use of force should be made available to the public and press upon request, and (2) upon request, footage should be made available in a timely manner to any filmed subject seeking to file a complaint, to criminal defendants, and to the next-of-kin of anyone whose death is related to the events captured on video. Departments must consider individual privacy concerns before making footage available to broad audiences.
5. **Preserve the independent evidentiary value of officer** reports by prohibiting officers from viewing footage before filing their reports. Footage of an event presents a partial—and sometimes misleading—perspective of how events unfolded. Pre-report viewing could cause an officer to conform the report to what the video appears to show, rather than what the officer actually saw.

**Signed by:**

American Civil Liberties Union

Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC

Asian Americans Advancing Justice | Asian Law Caucus

Asian Americans Advancing Justice | Los Angeles

Asian Americans Advancing Justice | Chicago

Center for Democracy and Technology

[Center for Media Justice](#)

ColorOfChange.org

[Data & Society](#)

Demand Progress

Demos

Electronic Frontier Foundation

Free Press

Hip Hop Caucus

The Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law

The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights

Martinez Street Women's Center

May First/People Link

Media Alliance

Media Literacy Project

Media Mobilizing Project

Million Hoodies Movement for Justice

NAACP

NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc.

National Association of Social Workers

National Council of La Raza

National Hispanic Media Coalition

National Urban League

[New America's Open Technology Institute](#)

Public Knowledge

Southwest Workers' Union

Urbana-Champaign Independent Media Center

Voices for Racial Justice

Working Narratives

Alvaro Bedoya, Executive Director, Center on Privacy and Technology at Georgetown Law\*

\* Affiliation for Identification Purposes Only