

BJA Body Worn Camera Training & Technical Assistance Oakland Police Department BWC Study Podcast

Todd Maxwell: Hello. I'm Todd Maxwell. I'm member of the Bureau of Justice Assistance Body-Worn Camera Team, and today I'm speaking with Chief Paul Figueroa of the Oakland Police Department. Assistant Chief Figueroa has worked with Oakland PD since 1991 and currently oversees all the Department's day-to-day operations. Previously he served as a Department's commander in the Patrol Division, Training Section, Internal Affairs Division, and Inspector General's Office and Chief of Staff to the Chief of Police.

He has extensive experience in field command, criminal investigations and community policing programs. Assistant Chief Figueroa is a nationally recognized expert in procedural justice and police legitimacy and as an adjunct Professor at Golden Gate University. He regularly lectures on the topics of trust, community policing, effective training and police accountability. He also has a Doctorate in Organizational Leadership from the University of La Verne. And today we'll be talking to him about body-worn camera program in the study with Stanford University.

Assistant Chief Figueroa to start off, can you tell us why the Oakland PD originally decided to get involved with the local research partner?

Chief Paul Figueroa: Yes, thank you, and good morning on this wonderful day in Washington here, nice and rainy. But yes, so we're in Oakland. We've been under Federal over-sighted as part of an agreement in a federal lawsuit through the Federal Court in San Francisco, and part of it is for us to collect and analyze data related to all of our stops in Oakland, are the types of enforcement we decide to do. And so part of that -- that agreement was interestingly enough was written back in 2003. We're hopefully in the last phases of it now.

And what's interesting is the body-worn camera footage and the born-worn camera program as it began and develop in about 2010, we really found was a supplement to the types of enforcement stops we were making.

We could actually see it at a newer level and a deeper level than just saying, we stop X amount of people per year for traffic violation. We stop X amount of people for a year for to do an investigatory stop.

What the body-worn camera footage really allowed us to do and we saw it as an augment to our research partnership with Stanford was allow us to look deeper into it. So Stanford came on board about two years ago to do the analysis of the stop data that we have been collecting for a number of years in Oakland.

And I mean, like I said, it was all part of the (contest decree) and where we're at today, and so all of these pieces kind of came together at once and it's very interesting that as we look at the national conversation today about policing, why we do what we do and the whole conversation about just because the police can't do it, should you do it, is really at the forefront.

And so all of these things have kind of come together at once in the body-worn camera footage in particular and this research partnership have really allowed us to say, let's dig as deep as we can into the stops and really address these issues that have been present in policing for a long time, and without this academic partnership it is very difficult to have not only just an independent analysis with an outside evaluator but to really have those rigorous research principles apply to this type of issue, so we can learn and try to implement some changes to make things better.

Todd Maxwell: Thank you. Can you give our listeners basically an overview what the study is about? I've read some of the abstract, but our listeners might not be familiar with this overall study.

Chief Paul Figueroa: So the study is basically -- we are looking at thousand stops or Stanford is looking at when I saw we just because we're (inextricably) as they say, but we're looking at a thousand stops and then we're looking at the videos related to those stops, and we're looking at what's the type of language the officers are using, what's the non-verbal Qs that we see.

So we're looking at facial expressions. Now, in body-worn cameras generally you don't get the face of the officer, it's looking directly at the person they are talking to.

So you get the facial expressions of the person that is being stopped, and so they are looking at that predictive of the outcomes. They are looking at using

voice and body language when things become escalated, when they become deescalated and how can we use that -- how can we leverage what we learn from those, you know, which officers use words that help deescalate, which ones use words that are escalating situations unfortunately.

And interestingly when you look at the body-worn camera footage, officers aren't there by themselves either. So you have one officer's camera might actually capture the officer that's doing the stop and the person they are interacting with. So it's just really -- it's a treasure trove of information related to these stops, and so that's how we're looking at it. That's the basic overview we're seeing.

What can we learn from the data? Sky is the limit. We're not aware of a lot of other agencies doing this now but we're going to make all of our research methodologies and findings publicly accessible, so that agencies can look at it and hopefully improve it and make it better, so that we can really focus on delivering quality law enforcement services to our community and community safety services to our community.

Todd Maxwell: Thank you. It was very interesting to hit one when I first heard about this thing because at the expert panel that you attended, Megan Smith, the US CTO happen to come up and said she was interested in seeing some sort of study about that, and I don't know if she had some insights, I believe she is from Sanford.

Chief Paul Figueroa: OK.

Todd Maxwell: Or she was just looking to have a study done and so the timing on that was great, and I know they've been involved with a couple of events at Stanford in body cameras. What are you guys hoping to get out of this partnership, and are you guys looking for other ways to continue after this research project is done?

Chief Paul Figueroa: So we're -- so I'd say the number one thing is we get an outside set of eyes looking at our issues. I can tell you having -- we've been working on this

issue since the inception of the agreement. Sometimes you get too close to it and you can't really see what you need to see.

And having outside experts and Professor Jennifer Eberhardt is the key research partner involved. She is the leading expert in the world frankly on implicit bias and how there maybe some argument to that, but she is, if not, the -- she is the top three and there wouldn't be argument to that.

And so getting someone in your department who brings that kind of analytical skill and ability at a world class level has just been great for our department. And so that's really what we're looking again. This partnership is having a real critical eye look at what we're doing as a department and how we can improve our service to the community in a way that's rigorous, that is done independently, and that is done in a way that's consistent with the best research that's available, best research methods that are available out there. And as much as I like to fancy myself as an academic from time to time, the bottom line is that you really have to -- if you're too close to it, it's hard to set the rigorous parameters you need and have that independent look at it.

So that's what we're looking for is really the brainpower, the thinking power behind what are the latest strategies out there and then the absolute commitment to rigorous research methodologies that Stanford brings to the table.

Todd Maxwell: Have you guys used this partnership for any other purposes? I know you guys periodically review your body-worn camera policy and other policies. Have you bounced ideas or used that -- leverage that partnership in any other ways besides just this focus study?

Chief Paul Figueroa: Yes. So we're also looking at things related to, you know, one are my interest is police legitimacy, procedural justice, so we're doing some evaluation around that. We're looking at how to measure the principles of procedural justice through body-worn camera analysis.

So the basic way to understand that is, I can watch the footage to see how my officers response at a car stop, at a domestic violence call and listen for those things we're listening for when we talk about procedural justice.

And frankly, that analysis and methodology can be used to measure anything you're looking for in a department. So if you're implementing a new policy as it relates to how to respond to forgery cases or how to response to, let's stick with domestic violence, you can go back and look at that training on the body-worn camera footage to see if they are exhibiting the trace and characteristics that you're looking for and the training that you've given them.

Right now how we respond to handle issues with mentally ill are critical for us, particularly as it relates to use of force. So using these methodology, you can go back, you can look at the body-worn camera footage, you can do an analysis of, are they incorporating these training and de-escalation techniques that we've taught them in those events. And so it's going to have a much broader impact.

Todd Maxwell: Great. So without revealing any outcomes, I know the report you mentioned earlier is coming out soon. What has surprised you most about the relationship with your research partner?

Chief Paul Figueroa: I think what's surprised me the most is that they -- I didn't expect that they would be putting this much time into it. I know that -- I know it sounds kind of odd, because I'm used to some of the methodology and things like that, but there is a level of commitment that has just been amazing and I expect the (readiness) from them but this is just above and beyond in terms of time and commitment.

I mean the number of people they've brought on to the team is and many more people than I expected to do it, the number of disciplines they are bringing to the team from world class linguists to experts in implicit bias to experts in conflict mediation that have all studied this for many, many years has just been absolutely amazing.

And I would say that, for us, what's been nice is the many, many different ways they are looking at this, opened up ideas in our mind about different ways we can look at it, and where we don't need an outside research partner but we can come to some findings very quickly by just looking at a certain amount of stops in coming up with ways to improve. And so it's just been -- it's been great to have this partnership.

Todd Maxwell: Part of the BJA's grant solicitation of body cameras talks about collaboration and getting involved in a collaborative form and part of that is sometimes working with the research partner. So would you recommend based on your experience and your experience with your research partner, other agencies partner with the research partner, and if so, why?

Chief Paul Figueroa: So absolutely. I mean I just think in the evidence-based world that we live in today where we seek funding, we seek moneys, we want to move forward as an organization. So you've got to do it based on information and data, and people want evidence-based solutions like don't just tell me it works, show me how it worked and give me the evidence that it actually had the impact and outcomes that you said it out, or if didn't have any incomes -- the outcomes that you wanted, tell us what you're going to do differently and then how you're going to measure that to see if it does have your desired outcome, and that's really critical.

And not only -- I've been working on this for many, many years and almost all of them now come out with a measurement research component that's (pass-through) because people want to know their money is going towards a good thing and that is being used in the right way without a partner who can engage in rigorous assessment of that, you're just going to be fine blind and people won't want to give money and fund those projects that don't have that evidence backing it up.

Todd Maxwell: Thank you. Probably one of the things you mentioned earlier was police legitimacy, and so do you guys have a community partner that's aware of some of the work you're doing or do you promote that with the community so they are aware of all the efforts you're trying to make in these fields?

Chief Paul Figueroa: Yes, so we regularly have different speaking events around the city where we talk about it. We -- our body-worn camera policy, as well as some of the other progressive things that are being done by the chief and institute in our department do get a lot of local coverage as well.

And so we're actually, as a part of the Stanford project, now we're trying to measure if people through all the coverage and when we speak and when we get a chance to talk at community groups and our regular partnerships, we're trying to measure whether people actually know we have body cameras, and if so, do they believe they make the police more accountable and had their opinion about police accountability change because police have our wearing body cameras.

And so we're trying to parse it down to that level and measure that now. So we absolutely are -- we get the info out to the community as much as possible and the Chief Whent did release some body-worn camera footage recently as it relates to officer -- as it related to some officer involved shootings proactively. So we didn't wait for a public information request. We didn't wait for the civil case and all that kind of stuff, and it was done. There was a lot of questions about it.

There was lot of coverage about it and it just -- it felt right given that the investigation part was done that we could release the body-worn camera footage in a proactive way within a few weeks of the event actually which we're very careful about it, the family saw it first, the family of the involved member, all the officers that were involved knew that the information is going to get released and media was allowed to come in and watch it first, ultimately it was released fully publicly, but, you know, the community sees that.

That is -- it was a lead story for quite some time. And so this is why it's critical for us to do the research on this on body-worn camera footage and for us to be aggressive on the policies related to it, because the community knows we haven't and the community partners that we have expect us to use it and to use the program and to use the footage to make ourselves better so that we deliver better service to our community.

Todd Maxwell: Great. Thank you, Assistant Chief Figueroa. We're grateful you could speak with us today and share your knowledge on this important topic. We encourage the law enforcement, justice, and public safety leaders whose agencies are interested in learning more about the implementation of body-worn camera programs to visit the Body-Worn Camera Toolkit at www.bja.gov/bwc.

This toolkit offers a variety of resources that agencies can use to help with the adoption and use for community engagement, policy development, data collection, officer training, and educational purposes.

We also encourage listeners to share and promote these resources with your colleagues and staff. Lastly, all these resources, and especially the Body-Worn Camera Toolkit, have been designed as a national resource, your resource.

Please submit your ideas for new content through the BWC support link at the bottom of the homepage. This is Todd Maxwell at the Body-Worn Camera Team signing off. Thank you for listening and we'll see you next time.

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