

BJA Body Worn Camera Training & Technical Assistance
Brian Acken- Montgomery County Police Department

(Chip Coldren): Hello. I'm Chip Coldren. I serve as the managing director for Justice Programs at CNA in the Safety and Security Division. And I also serve as the project director for the Bureau of Justice Assistances Body-Worn Camera Technical Assistance Program. Today, I'm speaking with Brian Acken, Chief Information Officer for the Montgomery County Police Department in Maryland. We wanted to speak with him about the department's decision to outfit officers with two cameras for their Body-Worn Camera Program.

Montgomery County Maryland is home to over a million residents and supports a significant commuting work population traveling in and around the national capital region. Brian's division within the Montgomery County Police Department supports the records and technology needs of over 3,000 officers and police employees across multiple agencies. He was a Pennsylvania State Trooper for 27 years and he retired as a major in 2012, that's 31 years of experience in the police environment.

Mr. Acken, thank you for speaking with me today. To start, you have a very unique camera program and that each officer has two Body-Worn Cameras assign to them, can you explain how this decision came to be?

(Brian Acken): Sure. So, when we were deciding our path moving forward into the Body-Camera environment, we do a lot of exploration as to how other departments have deployed and the technologies that were available. We came across two big stumbling blocks, one was the way the Montgomery County proposed (more at bidding) in a Metro area, so here with the DC National Capital region. The way we deploy officers is not necessarily the norm. So, we have district stations, we have six district stations across the county and the officers are signed to those district stations for patrol and criminal investigation functions.

However in Montgomery County, we also (vision) police car, a take home car to all officers, and many of those officers live in areas not associated with their district station. So, that's a normal course of business, 20 officers deployed for their day or deployed for their shift. Sometimes, has happen stands may be they will start from their station, they will start from a roll call conversation with their sergeant and their shift commander. Others however depending upon the logistics of where they're coming from, where their assignment is and what calls are pending in the 911 Center Queue. They may report directly from their residence and directly into their patrol unit or their patrol zone and start responding to calls.

So, I think that function and that design of how we do patrol, if I admit how by-cameras are technically deployed out in the world, they are one camera per officer, the officer starts their shift at the station at any of those shift with the station before they go home. That lends itself to, you know, an upload and a recharge cycle that didn't really mess with however way of doing business.

The second is we're working on very labor ordinate as environment here in Montgomery County, the labor union is very, very strong. And the idea that affirmations they have done where they would take the cameras home with them where they would recharge them at home simply was not a possibility. So leaving those two things together, we had to find solution that allowed me to not overly impact in a negative way but way I – we did patrol work in the department up to that point, and allow me to effectively capture the evidence uploaded appropriately and not cross over into the later conversation that which just slow this down, slow the whole design process going forward.

Ultimately, we sat with our vendor and had a very front conversation about all the possibilities or how we could architect this conversation. We talked about recording and, you know, in an officer where they're out in patrol and uploading and recharging from the car, but that didn't turn out to be practical and effective, pretty much every vendor we spoke to did not support that as a viable – consistently viable option technically.

So really, the only thing left out of that changing way we do business in patrol function which probably was just not acceptable from the beginning was that I literally propose to them and show me to camera and all where we would do a swap every other day basically, and that's ultimately what we came – what came to pass, we basically designed an architecture that stations have their technical docking stations and their electrical upgrades necessary for the document recharging and the uploading with data. The officers have two cameras assigned to them, they are hard coded to their active directory account. And one is always on the person while they're on patrol and the other is always in the back of the station recharging, waiting for its next use.

So, if they get in to the end of the shift, they swap them out and they're on their way, there's no extra time, there's no extra energy, it's literal just a swapping going on. If they don't feedback in their station at the end of the shift and they go home, and the next morning when they come in, again, somewhere during that day, they will be back in time before the battery is going to run out on the camera, the storage is going to run out on their camera and they'll swap it out for the next day.

It's basically how the decision came to be, it was more of a we didn't go in with that understanding or that goal, it really was something that's developed overtime just understanding that I wanted to – I mean, it clearly change in a wholesome environment from body cameras is a good thing and needs to happen, but there's positive change and then there's changes because the technology is simply isn't ready and we didn't what we want to do of where that negative change.

(Chip Coldren): Yes. That was a very interesting and detailed explanation, (Brian). I thank you very much for that and I'm sure our listeners will find that interesting and helpful. But I mentioned that many of them was kind of bulk at the press think of the cost of buying two cameras per officer if they were in the situation that you're in. So can you just talk a little bit about how you work with the vendor to negotiate a reasonable price for the cameras?

(Brian Acken): So that took a little bit of an insight and it was something that was also developed overtime as I interacted with multiple vendors. To begin very clear to me was that the cost of the cameras is to a larger extent kind of window dressing for these vendors. Now, I'm not a vendor and I'm not on the inside of their environment but it's what I observed. And what that means to me is that they don't really make a lot of money on the cameras and in fact in some cases, some vendors don't even care about the cost of the camera. The real dollars for them is in the long-term storage of the recordings, that's where the money is at.

So, I have heard this kind of response from other agencies that when we – can we talk about the two camera model, and my response is very simple, at the end of the day when we came out of it out of all of our discussions which were not that difficult to be quite honest, I ended up paying less per camera across the board. And if you had my two camera cost, I'm still coming in less than 50 percent of what other agencies have paid for one camera. And honestly, that's nothing more than just asking and demanding and pushing towards that conversation. Now, I pay for my storage and my storage is around the big dollars we're at.

The cameras when I pushed on the vendors, honestly they were almost long to give them to us, now they didn't give them just for free. But at the end of the day, you know, ascertaining vendor, their weekly price is 399 a camera. My cost for each of those cameras is \$100 and I'm getting two of them, so two for 200, half a price from their single price with it. I know other agencies have paid as well.

(Chip Coldren): Yes.

(Brian Acken): But it just comes in to, you know, pushing on them and showing them where the lines are, and at the end of the day, it worked out very well for us.

(Chip Coldren): And I don't imagine that having those two cameras increase your storage cost, right?

(Brian Acken): No, no, not at all. We still – their space storage is based on the user and, you know, but we actually end up with the non-limiters storage package sort of thing effective on that.

(Chip Coldren): Very interesting. So other than this saving of time, has there been any other benefits that you can think of, of having two cameras per officer?

(Brian Acken): Well, it also in my opinion is going to see the lifecycle of those cameras because they're in effecting these half as much as a good to go camera would on a single person, single camera configuration. So they do less warrants here. And we've – honestly, we've had now probably one to our pilot, it was probably six, seven months and now we're into full deployment for a thousand users. We've had very little issue with the cameras and cycling – any issues being returned to the vendor.

And it also, if one breaks, you know, the thing it do breaks, I have a, you know, a depo of support structures and where they can go and they can exchange them. And by 3 o'clock in the morning, that's not staffed. They have their own medical placing right there, they just go grab a camera and then they're back on the road with little or no impact. At this point honestly, I'm not seeing any downside to the conversation at all. And it just makes it simpler on the officer when they need to swap it out and work – it's not working correctly, they're just go and grab the other one.

(Chip Coldren): Thanks. And can you tell our listeners what – which vendor you're working with?

(Brian Acken): Sure. I wasn't sure your guys' opinion on that but we work with (Tazer) and, you know, review just that role other offerings at that time and we ended up actually being the soul source contract for (Tazer) which in Montgomery County, bureaucracy can be relatively challenging thing but we were successful in that process.

(Chip Coldren): Yes, good. Thank you. Is there just – so to close out, are there any other recommendations you would make to Body-Worn Camera sites and how they negotiate with vendors?

(Brian Acken): So I would say two things, one is do not for a minute believe that you don't have a lot of leverage in this conversation because we do. As a police agencies, the vendors need us and well, we're all committed to moving forward in the Body-Worn Camera to engagement, there are a lots of options depending upon the size of configuration in your agency. They have a lot of leverage in that conversation. Don't be timid about it, don't hold back, pushing the – the worst thing that could happen is say no and they walk on forward with, you know, a certain can make you want.

But I found with honestly the more we push, the more receptive they were to come into a deal. And I think something on people and the rest, now, look at other contract, they need to explore to a lot of other agencies contractors and the deals that they have made. I can see that they weren't very aggressive in taking advantage of that leverage that they have.

(Chip Coldren): Yes.

(Brian Acken): And I said, the last thing is that don't hold back on your demands, so like for example a storage for Montgomery County to where take the year is in the neighborhood of \$900,000 for a year of storage unlimited for a thousand users. Our first year storage is actually 460 because our demand was one at a 58 percent cut on our first year storage the lowest at budgetary worked into the conversation here in the county and that ultimately was accepted. And we do not ask for it, we would now been given it, we have to make that demand.

(Chip Coldren): Very interesting, thank you for that.

(Brian Acken): Yes.

(Chip Coldren): So and – thanks a lot (Brian) for taking the time up-to-date and talk with us. We are grateful that you could speak with us today and share your knowledge

on this important topic. We encourage a law enforcement, justice and public leaders who's agency they're 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 adaption and use for community engagement, policy development, data collection, officer training in educational purposes. We also encourage listeners to share and promote these resources which are colleagues and staff. Lastly, all lead resources and especially the Body-Worn Camera toolkit have been designed as a national resource, it's your resource.

Please submit your ideas for new content through the BWC support thing at the bottom of the homepage. This is (Chip Coldren) of the CAN Body-Worn Camera team signing off. Thank you, (Brian) and thank you to our listeners for joining us today.

END