

Senator Tim Scott  
SJC Subcommittee Hearing on Police Body Cameras  
Testimony

I want to thank both my senior Senator Chairman Graham, as well as Chairman Grassley for agreeing to hold a hearing today on this important issue.

Mr. Chairman –the past year has shown, in no uncertain terms, that there are problem spots across this country in interactions between law enforcement and minority and low-income communities. It is well past time for a national conversation about this and the policies affecting people that are growing up and living in communities like I did as a poor kid with a single mom in North Charleston, South Carolina.

Whether we are talking about Ferguson or Baltimore, Ohio or New York City, Tulsa Oklahoma or North Charleston South Carolina, working together to find meaningful, long-term solutions is absolutely critical. I have been working on many of these through my Opportunity Agenda, and will continue to do so, quite frankly, for the rest of my life – be it improving educational opportunity or emphasizing programs like apprenticeships to ensure the skills of the workforce match the needs of employers.

I am here today because I believe strongly that another important piece of that puzzle to help rebuild trust and construct brighter futures in many communities around the country is body-worn cameras. I say one piece, because I think we can all acknowledge there is no single solution, but rather many critical steps we must take to tackle poverty, criminal justice reform and instances of police brutality.

We are here today to listen and learn from experts as to how body-worn cameras will improve safety for both law enforcement officers and the public, as well as what challenges lie ahead for localities as they move forward with purchasing and using the cameras. We have some statistics available that we will hear more about today from another witness and that frankly are pretty amazing – one study shows that public complaints against officers wearing body cameras fell by almost 90% and that officers' use of force decreased by 60%. At a minimum, we owe it to our communities and law enforcement officers to consider this study and other evidence to explore the wisdom of widespread deployment of body-worn cameras.

I understand that there are multiple and complex questions surrounding the use of body cameras, including privacy concerns, data retention and disclosure issues, and the effects of recording on community relationships. It is essential that we explore these and other concerns today, and determine how we can best empower localities and states to utilize this technology and determine their rules for usage.

I am not proposing that we federalize local policing, or mandate the use of body-worn cameras, but rather that we find the best way possible to make technologies available to local departments looking for ways to keep both their officers and the public they serve safer. As

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states and localities around the country implement body-worn camera programs, we should consider ways in which the federal government may add to the conversation.

I would ask that we all remember the words of Mrs. Judy Scott, who lost her son Walter last month in my hometown of North Charleston. I had the chance to speak with this amazing woman and her family multiple times since this tragedy, and when I asked what she wanted to see, she said something seemingly obvious, but which should be the driving force behind what we do on this matter. Mrs. Scott simply said "I just want for no more mothers to have to bury their sons."

I believe that body-worn cameras are an important step towards helping achieve that goal, and that's why I look forward to hearing today's testimony from our experts. I hope to see you again soon in this committee, as I will be introducing legislation using the information we gain today, as well as from weeks of meeting with groups and coalitions invested in this matter.

Thank you again Mr. Chairman.