

NEWS RELEASE

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CPC's POSITION ON BODY-WORN CAMERAS AND PROPOSED STATE LEGISLATION

(Seattle) – Because body camera programs are already being implemented in law enforcement agencies across the state, and this is a new technology which may have unintended consequences of significance to communities across the state as well as in Seattle, the CPC believes it is premature to implement a body camera program in Seattle until and unless state laws are modified to address complex privacy and public disclosure concerns. We do not believe there has yet been sufficient public engagement in these issues to inform the necessary legislative modifications, which implicate important and competing values of public transparency and officer and civilian privacy. We therefore suggest that the state legislature and the City of Seattle push pause and approach this topic after further deliberation and community dialogue.

We see a need for more clarity both at the state and local level about the purpose of having police wear body cameras, which will also help determine whether that purpose will, in fact, be achieved by using them. Some cite police accountability as the sole purpose, while others believe that recordings will also be helpful for evidentiary purposes. Police jurisdictions and their communities must help define and make clear the intended use of such recordings. Those goals must then be considered alongside other important community values, including protecting personal privacy and safety, safeguarding community trust, and the need to balance privacy interests with public transparency.

In our view, because the issues are complex, there is a need to engage our communities before rushing to a final position on body cameras or on legislative changes. As well, it seems advisable to assimilate lessons learned during ongoing or completed body camera pilot projects conducted in Spokane, Seattle and elsewhere before taking legislative action. We recommend that Seattle not implement its body-worn camera program until the City of Seattle has more broadly engaged with the public regarding the challenges in the use of this technology in terms of balancing police accountability, individual privacy and safety interests, and open government goals. For many, the purpose of this new technology is to provide another tool that can help strengthen public trust in law enforcement by improved accountability; it would be unfortunate if by not striking the right balance, instead community trust was undermined.

We would welcome the opportunity to participate in whatever ways would be most constructive so that necessary legislative changes can be made in the next legislative session.

To learn more about the Community Police Commission, please visit www.seattle.gov/community-police-commission.

The Seattle Community Police Commission (CPC) provides community input to the development and revision of Seattle Police Department (SPD) policies and practices of significance to the public. The CPC has been working with SPD for the last two years on issues such as strengthening the police accountability system, anti-bias training, use of force policies, best practices in use of in-car video, and in recent months, policies with regard to body-worn cameras. Our commissioners represent a community cross-section including faith and business leaders, human services providers, civil rights advocates as well as two SPD employees representing SPD's rank and file and management unions.

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