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New Anchorage tax would add body-cams for cops to increase transparency

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The Municipality of Anchorage's Public Safety Committee and Mayor Ethan Berkowitz are proposing a new \$1.84 million special tax ordinance (AO 2020-116) to obtain body-worn cameras, in-car cameras, digital evidence management, and related technologies for the Anchorage Police Department.

The bond, to be presented to voters in April, would provide the Anchorage Police Department with equipment and software upgrades, and body cameras for all patrol officers. While not explicitly stated, the ordinance is another tool by the Assembly and Berkowitz Administration to ensure more accountability within the APD.

In July, Assembly Member Meg Zaletel introduced an ordinance to limit or restrict police use of force. Zaletel framed it as a call for more accountability, but many called it a gross overreach and overreaction, a way to appease a small but loud group of Black Lives Matter protesters.

While the Assembly and Berkowitz Administration continue to work to find ways to hold first responders accountable, the public at large has been more interested in holding its elected officials accountable for mismanagement of CARES Act relief funds and a unpopular plan to house homeless and treat drug addicts near schools and residential neighborhoods.

But now, the public will be asked to decide if body cams will improve life in Anchorage.

According to the libertarian-leaning Cato Institute, 89 percent of Americans support body cams for cops, with a majority of respondents saying that the cameras will protect officers from untrue allegations. Democrats and Independents were, however, more willing to raise taxes to outfit their local police departments with body cams, while Republicans were less likely to support those taxes.

[Read the Cato Report here.](#)

As for AO 2020-116, it comes with a projected cost of \$2.2 million a year. That's where the property owners come in: Property taxes would increase by \$5.32 per year on \$100,000 of assessed valuation.

If passed by the Assembly, the ordinance to borrow funds for police body cams will be on the ballot April 6, 2021.

The Assembly will take up the ordinance on Oct. 13 at its regularly scheduled meeting. **[The agenda can be seen at this link.](#)**

