

## **The Jacksonville Sheriff's Office should not remove body-camera videos**

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The Jacksonville Sheriff's Office decision to temporarily remove all but one of the body-camera videos of every police officer shooting since mid-2019 on its transparency website is a huge step backward for transparency.

It's becoming more difficult to see how police operate in this city, which erodes trust in an agency that is already struggling to connect with some communities.

The Sheriff's Office cites privacy concerns under the state's Marsy's Law. The police union's perspective is that officers' identities should be protected under Marsy's Law, a constitutional amendment approved by voters to protect the personal information of crime victims.

The Sheriff's Office added an advisory to its site explaining the videos will be re-released once the proper redactions are made, but did not provide a time frame. The Sheriff's Office says its doing edits and redactions.

James Craven, a legal scholar at the Cato Institute in Washington, D.C., is not surprised by this latest action by police, but he believes it's a bad decision. The think tank focuses on the protection of constitutional safeguards in the criminal justice system and accountability for law enforcement nationwide.

"Public confidence in policing has plummeted to nearly 50 percent since the murder of George Floyd. The only way to rebuild that confidence is through transparent frameworks that ensure offending officers are held accountable for wrongful actions," Craven said.

"The sheriff's decision to take down the bodycam footage, which serves as the public's window into police encounters, will create further doubt about police conduct. And it casts a long shadow over the work of the many good officers who protect the public and uphold the law," he said.

The decision also includes the deletion of videos of Sheriff's Office response-to-resistance hearings. That's where a review is held to determine if the actions of officers involved in shootings violated department standards or not.

This change comes a few months after the agency stopped identifying officers who shoot suspects, also citing Marsy's Law. This all follows an April appeals court decision that determined the voter-approved law can also shield police officer identities.

Fraternal Order of Police President Steve Zona sent a statement to the Times-Union for a story we reported recently saying the union is thankful that the department "is following the law as outlined in the recent court decision."

He also said that Jacksonville police officers don't check constitutional rights at the door when they come to work simply because they put on a uniform, and that protection for victims in Marsy's Law should also apply to police officers when they are victims.

That's one point of view. But considering families and community leaders have called for an outside agency to review Jacksonville police shootings for years — instead of the current internal process that follows the State Attorney's Office investigation — this decision is not good.

Attorney Harry Daniels, who filed a federal lawsuit in March against Officer Josue Garriga in the Dec. 14, 2019, shooting the death of Jamee Johnson for wrongful death, may have said it best in an earlier story reported by this newspaper.

He called the removal of body camera videos "a slap in the face" for residents who now cannot seek transparency and accountability for officer actions. The same goes for the deletion of the officer's response to resistance hearings that years ago were open to the public," he said.