



Should Police Officers Be Outfitted with Body Cameras?

By Kristine Frazao
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At the heart of the violence and chaos in Ferguson is one question: What actually happened in the moments leading up to the death of Michael Brown.

The public has heard from people who say they saw the incident. Authorities have spoken to the officer accused, but there's still something missing.

“If body worn cameras had been in place, there would be an objective account of the events that could at least be assessed for if the use of force policy was followed or not,” explained Chris Rickerd from the American Civil Liberties Union.

The ACLU often advocates against surveillance, but when it comes to the authorities being watched, he says it's a win-win situation.

“It would exonerate the police officer if the allegation of abuse were false, but also as you said provide an objective account of what happened,” said Rickerd.

We're not talking about giving police more heavy machinery. The so-called 'cop cams' already in use are made to clip onto an officers lapel or even onto their sunglasses.

In a one year study in Rialto, California the numbers speak for themselves. Use-of-force complaints against officers wearing the cameras dropped 60% and complaints in general went down 88%.

Walter Olson, a Senior Fellow at the Cato Institute, says this could also help police by sorting out untrue claims. He says if the cop cams become widely adopted, they would need to come with some restrictions.

"As they record what the police are doing, they are also recording often what citizens are doing. Perhaps storing that. Perhaps making it searchable," explained Olson. "If the film is there and is being stored for some period of time, someone else will want to use it."

The danger, he says, another trove of video with the ability to apply facial recognition software in cases totally un-related.

And even though the idea of uniform cameras has caught on with the events in Ferguson, Missouri this month, it's still unclear exactly what it would cost to equip every police officer in the United States with one - or who would pay for it.