



Position Statement:

Police Body Camera, October 2, 2014

Position

The police departments of Iowa should purchase body cameras for all their officers in order to aid in the prevention of crime. Policemen should be required to wear a body camera for three main reasons. First, the ability to provide video footage of police encounters with civilians would eliminate uncertainty in cases without witnesses or questions of police brutality or misconduct. Second, implementation of cameras would eliminate civilians' ability to falsely accuse police officers or others of crimes, or lie about what officers said or did at the crime scene. Lastly, people are less likely to commit acts of violence when they know they are being recorded (Marks).

Current Situation

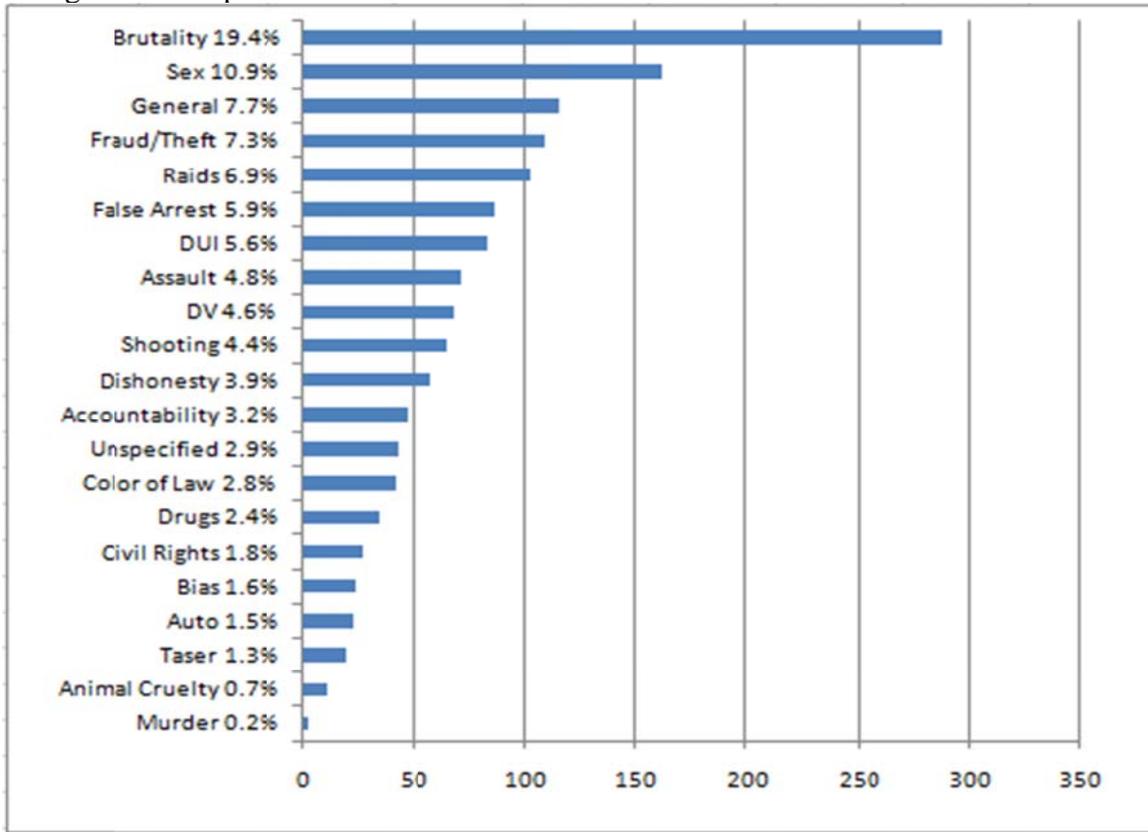
Body cameras are small devices that are usually attached to the head or upper body of a police officer and can be used to record daily work. Body cameras are used to hold police accountable for their actions and protect police officers that have been wrongly accused. According to Jay Stanley, a senior policy analyst at the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), the cameras "have the potential to be a win-win situation...A lot of departments are finding that for every time they're used to record an abusive officer, there are other times where they save an officer from a false accusation of abuse or unprofessional behavior." In 2010, a quarterly report was published by The National Police Misconduct Statistics and Reporting Project (NPMSRP) releasing statistics about the number of occurrences and types of crimes that were reported as police misconduct. Just last week, a South Carolina State Trooper was arrested for assault and battery of high aggravated nature for shooting a man four times after pulling him over for not wearing a seat belt. The Trooper continued to fire two more shots after seeing the man on the ground with both hands up, clearly unarmed. This incident was caught on the camera attached to the police car however much of the footage is cut out due to the car's inability to follow the action. Currently in the news, the case of Brandon Ellingson, a boy who was arrested for operating a boat while intoxicated, was handcuffed and escorted onto a police boat where he 'fell' into the water and drowned after his life jacket slipped off of him. The argument is that the police officer waited to jump into the water to help him, and that it was not possible for the life jacket to come off of Brandon while he was handcuffed (Hourigan). This would not be such a complicated case had the police officer been wearing a body camera. This is one of many cases that could be resolved with the basic level of evidence a body camera's footage would provide. In "Forcing America's Weaponized Police to Wear Cameras," Thompson argues that it is a crucial time in the United States to evaluate which methods and technologies can be utilized to reduce and prevent police brutality and common incidents of unnecessary use of force. The police cameras would hold the officers accountable and make them more aware of their behavior as

professionals and peacekeepers. Thompson explains that the cameras would be a way to take a step back from the militaristic direction in which the police have headed. Another incident was the Ferguson case, where Mike Brown was shot and killed by an officer because he was either raising his hands for surrender or about to attack the officer. If the officer had worn a body camera then it would have possible to know what Brown was doing.

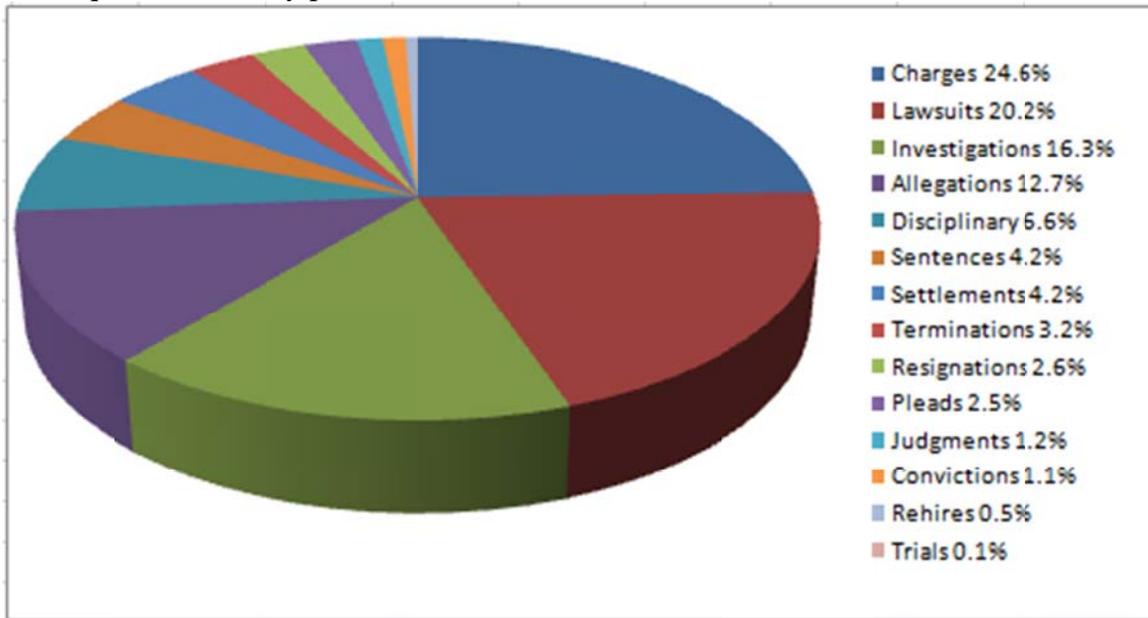
Rationale

Police body cameras should be enforced in the state of Iowa because it will decline the amount of complaints that citizens file. For example, a police chief, William Farrar, from Rialto, California, did an experiment on using body cameras for one year and found that there was an 88% decline in the amount of complaints, and a 60% decline of using force against citizens after police began wearing body cameras (Stross). In comparison to the dash cameras, body cameras allow more visibility and they see what is going on between the officer and the citizen. They also record audio a lot better. Dash cameras are sufficient but they don't give a good view of what is going on between the officer and the citizen and they do not record audio that well. After the Ferguson case, there has been a lot of talk about requiring police to wear body cameras. Iowa City and Coralville have already approved department plans to purchase body cameras for every police officer. Iowa City Police Chief Sam Hargadine will spend \$225,000 for 84 body cameras and Coralville Chief Barry Bedford will spend \$15,150 for 15 body cameras. The benefits of having these cameras will help with the safety of the officers, it will help with the professionalism and performance of the officer, reduce citizens' complaints, and it can help with handling different situations for officers that are in training. In an interview with KGAN, ICPD Captain Doug Hart said "It's [body cameras] become a very time saving device for us." Jay Stanley of ACLU argues that cameras are worth the costs. "In an era when police are obtaining very expensive, high-tech military weaponry that they don't need, it's silly to argue that this important technology that can serve as an important check in society on frequently abused police power shouldn't be a priority," he says. "The cost of one expensive citizen lawsuit against police can pay for a lot of cameras." There have been multiple cases around the country in which police body cameras have done huge amounts of good. In Bell County, Texas, where 300 officers have body worn cameras, the number of domestic violence cases that have been dismissed has dropped. The evidence given by the cameras make it difficult to refute the violence that has taken place. In Nampa, Idaho, when an officer had to shoot an aggressive dog, the body cameras gave proof of the dog's behavior and the owner issued an apology. In most cases like these, the officer would have probably been tried for animal cruelty had he not had a body camera. In Mesa, Arizona, a police officer got into a fight with an individual, which was captured on camera by a bystander, and caused the media and the people to call into question the officer's behavior. However, because of his body camera, he was able to show his side of the story and give a more balanced picture of what happened. In New Carrollton, Maryland, police officers discovered that the implementation of body cameras made their jobs easier because citizens behaved better, knowing they were on camera.

Charges made at police officers in 2010



Consequences faced by police



Charts are from the Cato Institute's National Police Misconduct Reporting Project report of 2010

Action Steps

The implementation of body cameras as mandatory for all police officers in Iowa would reduce the number of questionable instances of use of force by officers. Therefore, the number of complaints about use of force would be reduced, leading to fewer lawsuits against police departments in the state of Iowa. In the long term, this would save police departments thousands of dollars spent on going through investigations on questionable use of force. The cameras would eliminate any doubt in cases similar to that of Brandon Ellingson's drowning, which would lead to cases being resolved more efficiently and fairly. The cameras would hold all officers accountable for their actions as responsible peacekeepers. Body cameras should first be provided for the officers of the Des Moines Police Department. After a six month trial run of these officers using the cameras, the effects of the cameras on reducing instances of unnecessary use of force and eliminating citizens' complaints about any unnecessary discriminatory or otherwise inappropriate behavior from police officers should be evaluated. If the results are positive, then the cameras should be provided to all police officers in the state of Iowa in the span of two years. Police officers should be required to wear the cameras and have them on at all times while on duty. Research should be conducted within each police department to evaluate the effectiveness of the body cameras every three months for the first year that the cameras are used.

Regards,

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Further Reading

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