



House Bill 627

Public Safety – Law Enforcement Officers – Body-Worn Cameras

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Judiciary Committee

WITH AMENDMENTS

Date: March 12, 2015

From: Natasha Mehu and Leslie Knapp, Jr.

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS HB 627 WITH AMENDMENTS**. This bill establishes a comprehensive set of requirements for law enforcement officers and law enforcement agencies in regards to body-worn cameras.

MACo supports the ability for local law enforcement agencies to equip their officers with body-worn cameras. The use of body-worn cameras has the potential to aid police and community relations by creating trust and ensuring accountability.

However, body-worn cameras are still an emerging technology. Much is still being learned about the benefits, drawbacks, and limitations of their use as law enforcement agencies begin to adopt and deploy the technology. It is important for agencies to have set and clear policies on the use of cameras that garner the trust of the public. However, statewide requirements need to be balanced against local management. HB 627 should be amended to provide law enforcement agencies with greater flexibility to manage the protocols and protections that should be put in place to ensure video recordings are not widely available under public records requests.

Local Flexibility

Individual law enforcement agencies should be given greater flexibility in how they manage and implement their body-worn camera programs. Each local law enforcement agency is different and given their variation in size, services provided, budget, and constituents policed, it is difficult to put forward such detailed one-size-fits-all requirements.

The broad procedure and protection requirements that HB 627 establishes are important. It is essential to have a consistent framework in place. Nonetheless, the specifics concerning the use of cameras and the video collection and retention should remain under clear and express local policy. Local jurisdictions are in the best position to know what works for their agencies and constituents.

Public Information Requests

While it is important to have transparency, HB 627 should be amended to ensure that the recordings are not open to broad, time-consuming, and costly public information requests. Video and audio recordings require a person to watch or listen in real time to find specific information. Depending on the size of the police force using body-worn cameras and the amount of video footage, such information requests can be prohibitive.

The use of body-worn cameras can benefit law enforcement and the communities they protect. MACo supports the effort to develop a framework to guide law enforcement agencies, but respectfully requests the bill be amended to alleviate concerns over flexibility for local management and to ensure video recordings are not broadly available under public records requests. For these reasons, MACo requests a **FAVORABLE with AMENDMENTS** report on HB 627.