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Axon Plans 'Public Evidence Project' for Citizen Video

By **Crime and Justice News** | September 22, 2017

Axon, the largest vendor of police-worn body cameras, is moving into the business of capturing video taken by the public, [The Intercept reports](#)

(<https://theintercept.com/2017/09/21/taser-wants-to-build-an-army-of-smartphone-informants/>).

In a survey to law enforcement officials, the company formerly known as Taser International solicited naming ideas for its "Public Evidence Product."

The product will allow citizens to submit photos or video evidence of "a crime, suspicious activity, or event" to Evidence.com, the company's cloud-based storage platform, to help agencies "in solving a crime or gathering a fuller point of view from the public."

Civil rights advocates see this as another untested effort to co-opt community oversight and privatize criminal justice. "When police body cameras were initially established, it was because citizens were clamoring for police accountability," said Shahid Buttar of the Electronic Frontier Foundation.

"But we've seen how cameras have been more useful for police investigations than for accountability. This product realizes those dangers and takes them to a new dystopian level by crowdsourcing the collection of evidence and turning it over to law enforcement."

Body camera vendors like Taser originally pitched the collection of video evidence to lawmakers as a way to increase accountability, transparency, and trust between civilians and police. Three years and several million taxpayer dollars later, those promises have been called into question. Body camera footage has rarely been used to indict officers for brutality, and several states have introduced measures to restrict the public's access to it.

For privacy and civil rights organizations, enthusiasm about the technology has given way to concern about beat cops turning into walking surveillance cameras. Buttar and others fear that by adding civilian footage to Evidence.com, Axon is expanding this dragnet.

Axon has signed lucrative contracts with major police departments while it offers the rest its hardware free of charge, because its revenue comes from monthly subscriptions to Evidence.com. Axon's CEO has called this model "Dropbox for Cops."