

White House backs use of body cameras by police

September 16 2014, by Josh Lederman

Requiring police officers to wear body cameras is one potential solution for bridging deep mistrust between law enforcement and the public, the White House said, weighing in on a national debate sparked by the shooting of an unarmed black man last month in Ferguson, Missouri.

In the days and weeks after 18-year-old Michael Brown's death, more than 150,000 people took to the White House's website to sign a petition urging Obama to create and sign a law requiring all [police](#) to wear body cameras—small, lapel-mounted gadgets that record [law enforcement's](#) interactions with the public. That would require an act of Congress, but in a blog post, the White House said police departments are increasingly choosing to use the devices.

"We support the use of cameras and video technology by [law enforcement officers](#), and the Department of Justice continues to research best practices for implementation," Roy Austin, a White House adviser on Justice and Urban Affairs issues, wrote in response to the petition.

Austin said the Justice Department is evaluating how body cameras are working for departments already using them so they can be better deployed in the future. Yet he warned there were financial costs that "cannot be ignored," as well as unanswered questions about privacy—such as who should have access to the videos and how long they should be preserved.

An accompanying report from the Justice Department, long in the works before the Ferguson shooting, said there's evidence both police and civilians behave better when they know there are cameras around. The report also cites how footage from the cameras can be used to train officers.

But Austin warned that cameras alone can't solve the problem of mistrust. "Most Americans are law-abiding, and most law enforcement officers work hard day-in and day-out to protect and serve their communities," Austin said.

Demands for police to wear the cameras have increased across the country since Brown's death triggered street protests that drew the nation's focus to Ferguson. Some officers in the St. Louis suburb have since started wearing the cameras, and the New York Police department became the largest department in the U.S. to adopt the technology when it launched a pilot program in early September.

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Citation: White House backs use of body cameras by police (2014, September 16) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-09-white-house-body-cameras-police.html>

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