

Madalyn Letellier

From: Luke Sciarappa [REDACTED]
Sent: Saturday, July 18, 2026 12:15 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: On body-worn cameras

Follow Up Flag: Flag for follow up
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I am in favor of police officers wearing body-worn cameras.
--- Luke Sciarappa, [REDACTED] Somerville

Madalyn Letellier

From: Alexandra Thorn [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, July 9, 2026 9:30 AM
To: All City Council; Public Comments
Subject: please oppose 26-1189 and 26-1192 on body cameras

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My name is Alexandra Thorn, and I'm a Ward 5 constituent.

I am profoundly frustrated by the Mayor's antidemocratic efforts to push forward expensive body cameras for police at a time when other departments are facing layoffs and other painful cuts. Meanwhile, the new Surveillance Technology Impact Report (STIR) still fails to solve most of the problems with the original STIR, which were highlighted by over 20 community members in the May 14th council meeting (see <https://somervillema.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=8025055&GUID=237E808F-F965-4173-B444-EB259BD9D9AF&Options=&Search=>).

If the motivation behind putting body cameras on police is to ensure police accountability, then the data collected need to be controlled by civilians and the footage needs to be readily available to people captured by the cameras. Giving the police control over the footage makes clear that the primary intention is to use these cameras as another surveillance tool, and skews the power asymmetry between the police and the public further in the direction of the police.

Giving the police right to review footage before filing their reports also sets up another asymmetry between the police and the public: it isn't standard practice to allow private citizens facing criminal charges to review surveillance footage before making statements about their own activities.

Moves that increase concentration of power with the police are particularly poorly timed in an environment with strong public distrust of the police thanks to extensive human rights and civil liberties abuses by federal law enforcement, and with a federal administration committed to turning state and local police departments into a weapon against the public.

State and local governments have very limited power in face of the ongoing authoritarian takeover of the United States government, but we can make choices about how to use local resources, including investing in teachers, social workers, social safety nets, and day-to-day functions of government. Instead, the city is facing across-the-board

budget cuts while being asked to spend *more* on police and police infrastructure. This is the wrong direction to be moving in, especially without robust civilian oversight in place.

Alexandra

Madalyn Letellier

From: Lucia Mcalpin [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, July 21, 2026 9:42 AM
To: Public Comments
Subject: Re: body cams

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
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I am in favor of police wearing and using body cameras and for public transparency of results.

Lucia McAlpin - [REDACTED] Somerville 02145

On Fri, Jul 17, 2026, 7:00 AM Lucia Mcalpin [REDACTED] wrote:

I am in favor of accepting grant for police body cameras, enforced wearing, and transparency to the public.

Madalyn Letellier

From: Jered Floyd [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, July 22, 2026 10:36 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: Comment for hearing on body-worn cameras

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
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I'll keep it short: at a time we are slashing city services and staffing, we must not be increasing our spend on policing without first defining a fully-funded commitment to civilian oversight that is empowered to enforce consequences on bad actors within the SPD. That is a strict prerequisite, and the city council should not even consider this proposal until such a facility is in place. Promises by the mayor that this will happen later is an insult to every citizen.

Jered Floyd
[REDACTED]

Madalyn Letellier

From: Ashish Shrestha [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, July 23, 2026 7:24 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: Regarding Police Body-Worn Cameras

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
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It's my understanding that Mayor Wilson has called a special session to vote on a grant and implementation for police-worn body cameras. I am writing in opposition to this grant.

The city has not created proper/sufficient oversight of these cameras, meaning we will continue to be in the position where this camera footage is selectively released to re-enforce bias in favor of the police's viewpoint. Any implementation of body cameras needs the footage to be directly in the hands of a non-police oversight body, and such a body has not been properly created/chosen. Failure to have such a body means that these cameras are a tool of the police and not of the people, defeating their entire purpose.

Furthermore, acceptance of the grant would create a ~500k/yr cost to the city per reporting at the CSIndie. We are in the middle of a budget crisis and just had to lay off over a dozen city staffing positions related particularly and racial and social justice. The idea that we would turn around and feed that money to the police is abhorrent and highlights the hypocrisy of this current administration. If we have this money available to us, it should go into shoring up the departments that lost staff during the budget cuts. This is even worse given that the latest staffing study for the police actually suggested we *cut* positions and budget, not allow it to continue to balloon.

Thank you,
Ashish Shrestha
Ward 5

Madalyn Letellier

From: Alessandra Seiter [REDACTED]
Sent: Sunday, July 26, 2026 12:07 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: Comments on body-worn cameras for July 27 Special Meeting of the City Council

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Dear members of the Somerville City Council--

I hope you're all well, and I want to thank you for the immense amount of time and energy you've put into the issue of body-worn cameras over the past year. I also want to acknowledge that several of you have been advocating on this issue for much longer.

My belief is that the question of body-worn cameras is one on which reasonable people can disagree, and on which the details and context really matter. After careful consideration, and based on Somerville's current context, I believe it does not make sense to implement body-worn cameras in our city at this time.

I realize that it has been over a decade since the idea of adopting body-worn cameras in Somerville was first proposed. I also realize that we are finally at a place where significant stakeholders are aligned on adoption. However, I believe that the Technology-Specific Surveillance Use Policy (TSSUP) before you does not reflect the best practices recommended by legal experts and reflected in Somerville's [2023 Police Department Staffing & Operations Analysis](#) and [2025 Public Safety for All Task Force Final Report](#). Given the evidence that the efficacy of body-worn cameras for police accountability and violence prevention can hinge on these best practices (see the [National Institute of Justice \(NIJ\)'s Research on Body-Worn Cameras and Law Enforcement](#) and [ACLU's review of 70 empirical studies](#)), I believe that implementing body-worn cameras in Somerville under the current TSSUP would have negligible or harmful impact at significant monetary cost in a challenging fiscal moment that has already resulted in the dismissal of several dedicated public servants.

Below are my key areas of concern:

1. The current TSSUP specifies that "officers may not activate the camera at public demonstrations absent specific indica[tion] of unlawful activity" (p. 4). This is an important measure to protect the privacy of residents engaging in First Amendment-protected activity. However, later in the same paragraph, the TSSUP notes that if an officer has "notice of facts and circumstances giving rise to a reasonable belief that a civil disturbance will occur at a public event or demonstration," they may activate the body-worn camera and submit a Use Narrative after the fact. My concern here is with the vague nature of the term "civil disturbance," which does not have a legal definition under Massachusetts General Law and therefore provides broad leeway for an officer to interpret any gathering of residents as an appropriate situation in which to activate a body-worn camera.

2. The 2023 Police Department Staffing & Operations Analysis stresses that Somerville's body-worn camera policy "should be consistent with any statewide regulations adopted based on the Law Enforcement Body Camera Task Force recommendations published in August 2022" (p. 34). One of the [charges of this Task Force](#) was to establish "a requirement preventing an officer from accessing or viewing any recording of an incident involving the officer before the officer is required to make a statement about the incident" (p. 2). Somerville's 2023 study emphasizes this provision when referencing "other best practices for a body-worn camera policy, per the American Bar Association's Coalition on Racial and Ethnic Justice" (p. 35). The current TSSUP is inconsistent with these recommendations, allowing "officers who were involved in [a non-fatal officer-involved shooting or other non-fatal use of deadly force] ... to view their own BWC recording before giving a statement" (p. 5).
3. The 2025 Public Safety for All Task Force Final Report recommends that Somerville implement body-worn cameras with "clear policies allowing BWC footage to be reviewed by the civilian oversight commission" as a "salient feature" of such implementation (p. 20). While the current TSSUP does specify that "body worn camera recordings related to an ongoing investigation or in support of a prosecution shall be provided to the applicable law enforcement entity or police oversight authority" (p. 7), Somerville still does not have an established body for civilian oversight. As such, though the TSSUP includes the appropriate provision for police oversight, the provision's inclusion is moot until an appropriate body exists to uphold it.

The ACLU notes that "body cameras have not had statistically significant effects in decreasing police use of force." Similarly, the NIJ finds that "research does not necessarily support the effectiveness of body-worn cameras in achieving [improved officer safety, increased evidence quality, reduced civilian complaints, and reduced agency reliability]." Given the ambiguity of the positive impact of body-worn cameras and the fact that the current TSSUP does not reflect best practices, I encourage the City Council and the Wilson Administration to reconsider our city's implementation of this technology. Since we would soon have to expend \$400,000 annually in our own public funds to sustain a body-worn camera program, it does not make sense to me to implement a policy that requires additional revisions in service of accepting a one-time grant.

Thank you very much for your consideration and your careful attention to this important matter for our community.

Sincerely,
Alessandra Seiter
Ward 5 Resident

Madalyn Letellier

From: Steve Huff [REDACTED] >
Sent: Sunday, July 26, 2026 1:37 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: Public comment on body-worn cameras for July 17 Special Meeting

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Councilors,

The way in which we implement policy is just as important as the content of the policy we implement. I ask you to vote against the adoption of body-worn cameras, on the grounds that there is not yet a sufficient policy in place to control their use.

I don't find the argument about the brief window in which the grant is available to be particularly compelling. I've been following the topic of police governance in Somerville since 2019, and I have watched several mayoral administrations slow-walk the process of implementing any sort of civilian oversight, or police accountability, or meaningful structural change to policing in our city.

If senior Somerville PD personnel would like their optional pay raise, they have had ample time and opportunity to work on rolling out a policy governing use of body-worn cameras, including public engagement. It's not the Council's fault that the PD and the police union have chosen not to make this work a priority, and it would not be appropriate for the Council to forego its oversight responsibility in order to make it easier for the Mayor to give the police a raise.

Steve Huff
Ward 5

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<http://five.sentenc.es>

Madalyn Letellier

From: Christopher Beland [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, July 27, 2026 2:38 AM
To: Public Comments
Subject: Body cameras

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I submit these comments for the July 27 public hearing, which I will be unable to attend because it was scheduled for the same time as the Davis Square Neighborhood Council monthly meeting.

In my opinion, body-worn cameras should be widely deployed as soon as possible because they, more than almost any other technique, establish accurate facts for extremely important purposes:

- Oversight of police conduct
- Prosecution of criminal behavior
- Exoneration of those falsely accused

I am dismayed that after reaching an agreement with the police union in 2021[*2], five years later the city still hasn't formulated a use policy and funded full deployment. I will be outraged if we miss the opportunity to have the state cover the capital costs of this urgent upgrade.

I am also dismayed that the police union fought against the use of body-worn cameras in the first place, from 2015 to 2021[*1]. Documenting the truth advantages justice; the only logical motivation for this resistance (other than taking any excuse to extract more money) would be to hide bad police behavior. I feel there need to be changes in city or state law to reduce the scope of collective bargaining to avoid this type of process misuse. I have had positive experiences with Somerville Police in action and generally trust them to do the right thing, but the police brutality we have seen across the country highlights the need for countermeasures against even one "bad cop" in a department abusing their power.

With regard to the details of the use policy, I am a member of the ACLU, and think the ACLU model policy [*3] has many good elements (mandatory use, access controls, privacy provisions, retention limits, "no tape, no testimony", taking police reports only before officers are allowed to see the recording) but gets things a little wrong in these respects:

- Recordings of misdemeanors (not merely felonies) and traffic violations should also automatically be retained for 3 years or long enough to allow them to be used as evidence in court proceedings.
- Facial recognition and similar technologies should be permitted, but limited (perhaps by judicial warrant) to identifying a person suspected of a crime or protecting a person from harm. There should be a general policy (not specific to body cameras) which includes protections against misuse of unreliable technology (perhaps by requiring corroborating evidence after using facial recognition to generate investigative leads).

- Recordings of protests and demonstrations should not be prohibited. Misbehavior (by participants, counter-protesters, or police) can happen at any time, and it's better to have it on video. Police *should* be prohibited from using recordings to make databases of people based on protected speech, but this should be a general policy (not specific to body camera video). There should be a mechanism (perhaps a judicial warrant) for establishing an exception when there is a reasonable suspicion that a crime has been or will be committed. (For example, recording protected political hate speech might be permissible in an investigation of hate-motivated violence.)
- Officers should have discretion (not be *required*) to discontinue recording if doing so would make a witness or victim more comfortable or is necessary to get permission to enter a sensitive location on non-emergency business. The request should be recorded, and the officer may refuse if e.g. they fear the purpose of the request is to allow an attack to go unrecorded.
- Officers should have discretion to notify or not notify people that they are being recorded, as long as the camera is in plain view and they answer questions about it honestly. Members of the public should have the expectation that what they say and do in front of a police officer, including what the officer says and hears after being allowed into a private residence, may be noted and made a matter of public record or even the basis for criminal charges. Video recordings simply provide a more accurate memory. Reminding people they are being recorded may encourage them to behave better, or it may scare them away from helping the police.
- Supervisors should be allowed to search body camera footage to find violations of law or departmental policy by officers, if these searches have clear objectives and are audited. Police should be held to the highest standards of compliance. Small violations can be a red flag that a big violation could happen under pressure. Officers should have a dissent channel to complain about any policies that are making it difficult to do their jobs, and about unnecessarily intrusive oversight.

Thanks for reading,

Chris Beland



*1 <https://www.tuftsdaily.com/article/2020/02/body-cameras-complicate-somervilles-contract-negotiations-police>

*2 <https://www.somervillema.gov/policebodycameras>

*3 https://www.aclum.org/app/uploads/drupal/sites/default/files/field_documents/model_body-worn_camera_policy_2020.6.12_near_final.pdf

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If the police are to activate their body cameras any time they interact with the public, that means they would active the cameras if they entered my home while I was there.

Recording me in my own home without my consent and without a warrant could be considered a felony violation of

Mass. Gen. Laws ch. 272, Section 99

Please don't take away our freedom.

Please do not impose universal, warrant-less, police state surveillance!

Henry Edward Hardy
former Senior Systems Administrator
Tufts University*

* institutional affiliation for identification purpose only.

Henry Edward Hardy

[REDACTED]

pronouns: he or they

Madalyn Letellier

From: Elizabeth Sweeny [REDACTED]
Sent: Sunday, July 26, 2026 6:55 PM
To: Public Comments
Cc: Ben Ewen-Campen; Mayor's Office
Subject: opposing body-worn cameras

This email is from an external source. Use caution responding to it, opening attachments or clicking links.

To whom it may concern:

I'm disappointed that Mayor Wilson is pushing so hard for increased funding for police.

The City has recently done layoffs, and throughout this budget season I have heard about difficult cuts we need to make. And yet the Mayor's office is pushing for adding approximately \$445,000 per year in expenses to the City's budget by adding body-worn cameras [BWCs] for the police.

The announcement of this July 27 special meeting of the City Council and public hearing on body-worn cameras notes that, "After the death of George Floyd in 2020, [the City committed to a ten-point plan to address systemic racism](#). The plan included achieving the goal (first launched in 2015) for police officers to deploy body-worn cameras for the safety and protection of both the public and officers."

However, this 10-point plan also includes, "**Establishment of an independent, civilian oversight structure of the Somerville Police Department with membership representative of the community's diversity.**" We do not have such a civilian oversight body.

If the primary purpose of body-worn cameras is truly a tool for transparency and accountability of policing as requested by the public, why not wait until we have a civilian oversight body before pursuing body-worn cameras? Or make such an oversight body a condition of implementing body-worn cameras?

Since the death of George Floyd in 2020, Somerville has made little progress on its 10-point plan to address systemic racism. It's concerning to me that "give the police more money" is the one item the City is pushing -- and it does not give me confidence that the City will move expeditiously to implement a civilian oversight body, even though if we do adopt body-worn cameras it will become even more urgent for us to have such an oversight body.

The ACLU has asserted that, "If [body worn cameras are] to be effective at providing oversight, reducing police abuses, and increasing community trust, it is vital that they be deployed with good policies to ensure they accomplish those goals. Without good policies, they risk becoming just another police surveillance device—and one with very real potential to invade privacy. Especially important are policies governing when the cameras are turned on, and who has access to the footage and under what conditions." (<https://www.aclu.org/issues/privacy-technology/surveillance-technologies/police-body-cameras>)

What are the policies that we have?

During the STIR (Surveillance Technology Impact Report) for body-worn cameras presentation City Council meeting on April 26, 2026, Derrick Rice laid out a variety of concerns. I will not rehash them all, but I will highlight a few that are of particular concern to me.

Derrick Rice noted that we need to say, in the policy, that the point of having the cameras is for police oversight and accountability, but the proposed language does not. The current SPEA [Somerville Police Employees Association] agreement states, "It is further understood that disciplinary actions and excessive monitoring is not the intended purpose of GPS monitoring or BWCs." To me, the primary argument for BWCs is to be able to hold police officers accountable for inappropriate behavior. It absolutely should be made explicit that one core purpose of BWCs is to provide a basis for disciplinary action against police officers as warranted (and thereby hopefully also to deter inappropriate behavior from happening in the first place -- though BWCs should certainly not be our only tool toward that goal).

We also need a prohibition of police review of BWC footage prior to written statements or testimony from the police.

The American Bar Association [ABA] [Principles on Law Enforcement Body-Worn Camera Policies](#) state:

permitting officers to review recordings before preparing any written reports can undermine the accuracy of those reports in two concerning ways. First, some officers potentially could use video to manufacture after-the-fact justifications for their actions or to engage in deception about their contemporaneous observations or motivations, a concern of particular salience where there has been a use of force. [...] Second, human memory is fallible; individuals can believe, in good faith, that they accurately remember an event when, in fact, their memories are inaccurate. [...] When individuals experience an event and then watch video of that event, for example, their review of the video may overwrite or modify their contemporaneous memory of the event.

Another consideration further supports requiring officers to prepare reports before reviewing footage: "Allowing police—but not suspects or witnesses—to view body camera footage before providing their account of an incident unfairly bolsters the officers' account, and thus credibility, by allowing officers to recall more details seemingly more accurately than others and to conform their recollections (consciously or subconsciously) to those seemingly supported by the video."

The most appropriate way to balance these various considerations is to require that officers prepare reports before reviewing BWC footage, and supplement those reports if necessary following review of footage.

I think that even in cases of inappropriate use of force by police, BWC footage is not going to be the clear discloser of ultimate truth that many hope it will be. A 2024 article notes that, "In a [\[2023\] study](#) conducted by theGrio and Big Local News, 10 attorneys, advocates, advocates, and researchers were shown the same body camera footage of three incidents depicting use of force by police in New York, California, and Tennessee and asked a series of questions about what they witnessed. The experts were not able to agree on what they saw or heard, particularly in regard to what types of forces were used by police and whether attempts had been made to deescalate beforehand." (<https://prismreports.org/2024/07/16/complex-troubling-history-police-body-cameras/>)

But if we are to have BWCs, we must also have clear and enforceable policy requiring that police write up their own reports/testimony of an incident before reviewing the footage. (If they then wish to provide a supplemental report after reviewing the footage, they may do so -- per the ABA principles above, echoed by Councilor Ewen-Campen's recommendation.)

Derrick Rice's slides note that the STIR says, "Body worn camera recordings are presumptively public records subject to disclosure under the Public Records Law," whereas what's recommended is, "Explicit right to access for subjects of footage, with an explicit timeline for that footage to be provided (typically within a week)."

I have seen Chris Dwan on Bluesky reporting about his attempts to get the Boston police and the MA state police to comply with FOIA requests for protest surveillance -- with the supervisor of records determining that the department must either produce the records or provide a justification for why they are being withheld and the department then still failing to do either for weeks and even months. This does not give me confidence that the Somerville police will be more forthcoming, and instead it supports the argument that we need strong policies to make public access to footage a reality.

Speaking of protest surveillance, Derrick Rice's slides also note that "STIR explicitly grants broad officer discretion to passively record the public 'if they feel it useful or necessary'," which is concerning to me. The April 24, 2026, [community letter](#) "Minimum Policy Requirements for Police use of Body-Worn Cameras Which Are Widely Recommended By Prior Expert Guidance" includes item (6) "Civilian privacy protections and rights regarding being recorded" with a helpful recommendation: "The policy must clearly define privacy protections including (a) requiring officers to provide notice to the public that they are being recorded when feasible, (b) specifying when and how individuals can opt-out of being recorded, and (c) specific locations or situations where recording is forbidden (e.g. schools)." This seems to me to also be an important piece of policy that we must have before starting use of BWCs.

That April 24, 2026, letter outlines 10 minimum BWC policy requirements that the writers/signatories see as required for implementation -- all backed up by recommendations from the American Bar Association, the ACLU of Massachusetts, the State of Massachusetts' Law Enforcement Body Camera Task Force, Somerville City Councilor Ben Ewen-Campen's Recommendations, the SPD Staffing and Operations Analysis, and Somerville's Public Safety for All Task Force. As Derrick Rice's slides noted, many of these recommendations are in conflict with the proposed STIR, unsatisfied by the proposed STIR, or only partially satisfied by the proposed STIR (<https://bsky.app/profile/somersshade.bsky.social/post/3mk oldkyqc2b>). We need to align our policy with best practices **before** we implement body-worn cameras.

I urge the City Council to reject this body-worn camera funding. We need to first create and finalize binding policy based on best practices and expert recommendations that will govern the usage of body-worn cameras. Only after such policy is in place would it be prudent to begin the process of funding and implementing body-worn cameras. We cannot commit the money now, merely hoping that policy improvements will follow.

Thank you,
Elizabeth Sweeny

 Somerville MA
pronouns: she/her/hers

Madalyn Letellier

From: Farriss Collins [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, July 27, 2026 10:24 AM
To: Public Comments
Cc: Mayor's Office; Somerville Police Shuemeane. Beneford
Subject: Law Enforcement Body Cameras

This email is from an external source. Use caution responding to it, opening attachments or clicking links.

To: The Honorable Mayor Jake Wilson,

Good morning I hope this finds you well. I have copied the city council as well Chief Benford concerning Body Cameras for law enforcement.

Editorial Style:

Body Camera's for Somerville Law Enforcement:

- . I assume the matter at hand has been discussed with Chief Benford. As well as the union.
- . Question will this/there be a pilot program?
- . Cost I assume will be figured in.
- . I am myself am for law enforcement wearing body camera's.
- . My reasoning is based on a multitude of reasons :
 - . Transparency, accountability on both law enforcements side, but the supposed criminals side , as well the publics side.
 - . There is a great deal of distrust in law enforcement some rightly so.
- As well as a great deal of unmitigated hatred aimed at law enforcement members.
- . Look no further than certain members of our council members as well as a percentage of our residents.
- . I believe what is occurring nation wide with new members of ICE being largely unvetted and untrained is adding to the need for transparency.

Our cities law enforcement members:

- . For the most part are well trained, competent, intelligent, respectful and care about our communities residents.
 - . Individuals in the general public do not realize that it's not just six months of intensive training but mandatory continuing development, education and certifications that are required.
 - . Many members have undergraduate, masters and continuing educational certification in areas of not just criminal justice but drug and alcohol counseling, psychology.
 - . Many have training in various aspects of dealing with individuals with developmental issues, mental health issues as well as dual diagnosis.
 - . More training is needed and should required
 - . Law enforcement is needed in our city, state as well as our country.
- They are there to provide a service when our community as a whole. They show up at accidents, heart attacks, assaults, break ins, domestic violence (one of the worst) child abuse, elder abuse, animal abuse at times on the worst day of our lives as well as there's.

. At times on one of the best day's of your life and there's they have literally comforted someone, found a peaceful resolution to a problem or assisted our community members in a non confrontational manner without ever having to draw their firearm restrain anyone.

Learning Tool:

. The reasoning behind all of these examples and my thoughts on the why's is they can be an incredible and effective learning tool for law enforcement members.

. At any given time, yes even with all of the extensive training law enforcement members have a split second to make difficult.

. At times a decision that can forever alter the individuals life or the members of law enforcement.

. Camera's are valuable in teaching law enforcement were they can improve on the skills or simply they truly have taken the correct action.

. That being stated I do not want to hear from our residents and politicians " I/We Demand the footage now!" The very basic in investigations need to take place period.

. If wrong doing is found by all means please release footage and accountability needs to occur.

. Yet in our city it will not just be used for transparency as well as learning tool to protect the public as well as law enforcement but a weapon by a faction of our residents as well as our politicians.

In parting all for Body Camera's yet not to be used as a tool of weaponization against every member of law enforcement community.

Sincerely,

Farriss Ann Collins



Somerville, Massachusetts
02145

[Yahoo Mail: Search, Organize, Conquer](#)

Madalyn Letellier

From: Anna Rusnak [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, July 27, 2026 10:33 AM
To: Public Comments
Subject: Comments on the Implementation of Body-Worn Cameras by the Somerville Police Department

This email is from an external source. Use caution responding to it, opening attachments or clicking links.

To the Somerville City Clerk,

Please accept the following as public comment for tonight's Special Meeting and Public Hearing on the Implementation of Body-Worn Cameras by the Somerville Police Department. I plan to attend and speak, but am submitting this in writing in advance in case time does not allow for me to be called on.

I would like to point out that the evidence on body cameras' effectiveness in reducing excessive use of force is mixed. The city's own "Public Safety For All report" acknowledges that this effectiveness depends heavily on setting and implementation. Given that the projected cost is roughly \$450,000 a year, I don't think it's unreasonable to ask that the safeguards which would actually make this effective, such as a civilian oversight board, restrictions on officers reviewing footage before writing reports, and a clear activation policy, be in place before we commit to that spending.

Best,
Anna Rusnak
[REDACTED], Somerville, MA 02145

Madalyn Letellier

From: erich ludwig [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, July 27, 2026 10:41 AM
To: Public Comments; Jon Link; Ben Ewen-Campen; Jake Wilson
Subject: NO to body worn cameras in Somerville

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Hello-

I'm writing to register my opposition to the adoption of BWC (body worn cameras) by Somerville's police.

1) This is not how we should be spending our limited funds. The estimates are very likely undercounts, and we're in a tough budget moment.

2) It is not clear to me that we've done things in the right order - we don't have a civilian oversight board, and we don't have clear transparent publicly available policy around things like activation, review, footage access, and when and how officers can look at their own footage. IF we think BWC can be good things, they can only be good when there is strong policy and a strong oversight board - we have neither right now.

3) The negotiation on this seems to have gone wrong end first, including starting with senior officers. I'm not confident this negotiation puts anyone other than police officers in a better position. BWC aren't meant to be for police benefit, rather for the public benefit - again I'm not confident we've cleared this bar, so we should not invest in this at this moment.

Thank you.

-erich

[REDACTED] Somerville, MA 02143. Ward 3.

--

Erich Ludwig

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Madalyn Letellier

From: Emma Baker [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, July 27, 2026 11:01 AM
To: Madalyn Letellier
Subject: Re: Against body cameras

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Emma Baker
Ward 2

From: Emma Baker [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, July 27, 2026 8:58 AM
To: Public Comments [REDACTED]
Subject: Against body cameras

Good morning,

I hope you're doing well! I'm writing to oppose introducing body cameras to SPD.

In a time where my community members and I find ourselves constantly bombarded with new forms of surveillance at every turn, I adamantly oppose another.

Though proponents assert the cameras ensure effective and ethical policing, the opposite has played out in other departments across the country, where officers can turn off body cameras whenever they please and departments can withhold footage from the public, all while generally contributing to a fear of increased surveillance in the community.

The decision warrants more time for public consideration, and specifically engagement with the large cohort of folks in Somerville advocating for defunding SPD.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

City of Somerville Public Records Notice

Please be advised that the Massachusetts Attorney General has determined that email is a public record unless the content of the email falls within one of the stated exemptions under the Massachusetts Public Records Laws.

Madalyn Letellier

From: Alexandra Thorn [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, July 27, 2026 11:14 AM
To: Public Comments
Cc: All City Council
Subject: Please do not approve BWC at this time

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Flagged

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Dear City Clerk and Members of the Council,

My name is Alexandra Thorn, and I live in Ward 5. I'm asking that the Council please **not** approve the purchase of body cameras or the current STIR or TSSUP at the Special Meeting tonight.

On extremely thin justification, the Mayor is trying to fast-track approval of expensive surveillance technology with complex implications for privacy and police power. Procedurally, the Mayor has repeatedly disregarded the opinions of Council and of the public, and although the most recent version of the STIR has some minor revisions that respond to some of the concerns expressed in earlier stages, it still falls severely short of expert recommendations and the kind of policy that we should accept. Furthermore, submission of the current STIR and TSSUP just two business days before this highly unusual Special Meeting disregards the importance of public review or Council deliberation.

Speaking as one of the residents who has been working hard to understand what is happening and provide good information to the public, I can say that we were scrambling to review the relevant materials and release notes to the public before Thursday afternoon.

I can't articulate how frustrating it was to then suddenly learn on Friday morning that yet another STIR had been released on Thursday night. There are reasons why we have procedures in place to allow for people to read and understand city documents before they are approved, but the Mayor seems to feel that a lack of planning on his part should constitute an emergency on ours.

The Mayor's urgency plays into a pervasive public perception that police body cameras are primarily a tool for police oversight, but what we are being asked to approve is warrantless surveillance. If a friend of mine started recording everywhere they went and everyone they met, my first conclusion would not be that they were doing this in order to let others hold them accountable for their behavior. This is no different. A body camera does not point at the person wearing it, but at everything that person looks at. Police body cameras also record every conversation the police have with people on the street, and under the current STIR, the police would hold this footage for a **minimum** of six months. Meanwhile, the STIR specifies that conversations between police officers could not be recorded without specific permission from the police Chief.

The vast majority of captured footage will have nothing to do with brutality by the police, and in fact, two of the four uses for body cameras listed in the STIR are to determine probable cause for arrest and to document crime scenes. The STIR also allows police to record First Amendment protected protests if they think there is a chance that a crime could be committed. That means that the whole crowd can be recorded if the police imagine that one person might do something illegal. This should be extremely concerning during the age of facial recognition technology, AI summaries, and a federal administration that equates dissent with terrorism.

Somerville, it should be noted, still participates in BRIC fusion center, which means that information our police obtain about residents can be entered into databases that are freely shared with other law enforcement, including ICE.

There are real tradeoffs involved in turning police officers into walking surveillance cameras, even if the technology were free.

Instead, the Mayor wants to commit the city to spending \$400,000 per year---salary for up to five employees---on police infrastructure and police salaries, immediately after having laid off 16 civilian employees. This is not a decision that should be rushed.

Again, please reject the Mayor's effort to get rushed approval for body cameras on Somerville police. The program is too expensive for our current budget, and Council and the public need more time to assess the implications of this policy.

Thank you,
Alexandra Thorn

[REDACTED]

July 26, 2026

Public Statement

Dear Honorable City Council, Mayor Wilson, and Members of the Administration:

My name is Elyse Best, and I am writing as a Somerville resident of Ward 3 in my personal capacity regarding the City's planned implementation of police body-worn cameras. The views and concerns expressed in this letter are my own and are independent of any roles or responsibilities I may hold.

I have not reached a conclusion about whether body-worn cameras are ultimately the right policy choice for Somerville. I continue to have mixed feelings about this issue. There are important arguments on all sides, and I have made a genuine effort to consider both the potential benefits and potential risks associated with this technology and its implementation.

Since the City has chosen to move forward with select police body-worn cameras, it has an obligation to ensure that implementation is guided by strong ethical standards, transparency, meaningful oversight.

My primary concern is not simply whether Somerville adopts body-worn cameras. The City has already taken steps toward implementation and has developed a limited proposed policy framework. My concern is whether that framework is sufficiently strong to ensure accountability, ensure human rights, protect civil liberties, and maintain public trust once the technology becomes operational. Based on concerns raised by experts, community members and my own review, I don't believe there is sufficient evidence that these will be protected.

WE DESERVE to clearly understand how this technology will affect us AND where it comes from: when they may be recorded, who may access recordings, how long footage will be retained, what safeguards exist to prevent misuse, and what avenues exist for independent review and accountability. They directly affect human rights, constitutional rights, civil liberties, privacy, and the relationship between residents and the institutions responsible for public safety.

Public Trust Requires Transparency and Meaningful Engagement

Public trust is built through openness, thoughtful deliberation, and meaningful community participation throughout the process. It is strengthened when residents feel their questions and concerns are heard and considered. **Trust is earned** when their municipality makes their residents' concerns and solutions priorities. Trust is not created simply by adopting new technology that comes from a questionable company; it is created through the careful, transparent, and accountable process used to govern that technology. Rushing through a public meeting when petitioners the hearing for

September makes me think who's calling the shots and why subvert what our community wants?

Protecting Residents During Sensitive Encounters

Body-worn cameras represent one of the most significant accountability and surveillance decisions the City can make. Their impact extends beyond law enforcement operations. These policies affect every resident who may interact with police officers, including people experiencing mental health crises, people with disabilities, immigrants, communities of color, survivors of trauma, people experiencing homelessness, and other residents who may experience greater barriers to trust or access to public systems.

The question is not only whether body-worn cameras improve accountability in theory, but whether they may create additional risks in practice.

I am a person with complex invisible and permanent disabilities. I worry about my own safety and privacy, too. Individuals experiencing mental health crises, communication differences, or other challenging circumstances may not understand or worry that recorded interactions could later be misunderstood or used against them rather than viewed in context. (This goes for any targeted and vulnerable community.) Mental health advocates, including organizations such as NAMI Minnesota, have raised concerns that increased recording during crisis situations may affect trust and willingness to seek assistance if residents fear that encounters intended to provide support could become permanent records without sufficient protections.

<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11159584/>

Please refer to this framework example Somerville may use as a stronger foundation on which to build for true collaboration and fuller outreach:

https://www.lcc.mn.gov/lcdp/meetings/12012015/NAMI_Minnesota_Policy_on_Police_Body_Cameras.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com

These concerns make strong privacy safeguards, appropriate training, and independent oversight especially important.

Accountability Depends on Strong Policy Safeguards

The technology itself does not automatically create accountability. Accountability depends on the policies surrounding that technology: when cameras must be activated, who controls access to recordings, how footage is reviewed, how violations are addressed, how privacy is protected, and whether meaningful independent oversight exists.

The community policy analysis submitted to the City Council identifies several areas where the proposed policy differs from recommendations made by organizations such as the **American Civil Liberties Union** of Massachusetts and the American Bar Association. **These concerns include allowing officers to review footage before completing written reports, not clearly establishing timely access to footage for individuals who are recorded, and permitting broad discretion regarding the recording of public assemblies when officers believe unlawful activity may occur.**

These issues are significant! **Strong policies and clear safeguards are necessary to ensure that recordings are used to promote transparency and accountability while protecting residents from unnecessary or inappropriate surveillance.**

The Need for Independent Civilian Oversight

The City's Civilian Oversight Task Force recognized the importance of independent oversight and recommended that a civilian oversight body have meaningful access to body-worn camera footage, consistent with applicable law, so that it can effectively fulfill its responsibilities.

I recognize that establishing an independent civilian oversight structure requires time, planning, resources, and thoughtful implementation. I also recognize that the City has taken steps in that direction. The FY2027 budget reflects a commitment to advancing police oversight and accountability by designing a Police accountability program manager intended to help establish and support a civilian oversight body. That doesn't position doesn't get filled until the beginning of the year.

At the same time, the same time oversight structure DOES NOT EXIST and has not yet been established so we don't have clearly defined authority, procedures, resources, and operational capacity to provide ongoing review of practices and police body-worn camera footage, so civilians are protected from OUR point of view. So, again, why are we putting BWC's first before we developed the governance infrastructure to support ALL our community? The policies, responsibilities, and mechanisms for independent review are as important as the technology implementation itself!

I agree that accountability is essential whenever residents interact with law enforcement. My goal is not to diminish the importance of public safety or officer accountability. Rather, I hope the City will ensure that any police body-worn camera program protects both residents and law enforcement through clear policies, meaningful safeguards, independent oversight, and transparent governance.

Ultimately, I want every member of our community to be treated fairly, respectfully, and with dignity. Strong oversight and thoughtful implementation will help build the public trust that any accountability system requires.

Financial Responsibility and Long-Term Costs

The financial implications also deserve greater public discussion. The long-term cost of implementing body-worn cameras includes significant ongoing expenses related to data storage, software licensing, equipment replacement, training, personnel, records management, and administration.

While a once-off grant funding may offset some initial costs, residents deserve a clear understanding of the full financial commitment and how it fits within the City's broader fiscal responsibilities. I want full transparency on this.

Body-worn cameras are not simply a one-time purchase; they create a lasting financial obligation for future administrations and residents. At a time when public resources are limited, the City should prioritize investments that most directly protect and support vulnerable communities before adding another large recurring expense. While a once-off grant funding may offset some initial costs, residents deserve a clear understanding of the full financial commitment and how it fits within the City's broader fiscal responsibilities. I want full transparency on this.

Requested Safeguards Before Implementation

If the City proceeds with implementation, I respectfully request that the following safeguards, ALL of which reflect recommendations from experts, civil liberties organizations, accountability frameworks, and community input, be meaningfully incorporated into the final policy and implementation process, I will repeat here:

- The policy should be carefully evaluated against recommendations from organizations such as the American Bar Association, the ACLU of Massachusetts, the Massachusetts Law Enforcement Body Camera Task Force, and Somerville's own Police Department Staffing and Operations Analysis. Any significant differences or departures from these recommendations should be clearly explained to the public.
- The policy should clearly establish when cameras must be activated and deactivated, limit unnecessary officer discretion, and include meaningful accountability measures when policies are not followed.
- Individuals recorded by body-worn cameras should have clear and timely access to footage involving themselves, consistent with applicable laws and privacy protections.
- Strong privacy safeguards should be established, including restrictions on recording in sensitive settings, people in crises, protections for constitutionally protected activities, and clear limitations on the use, sharing, and retention of footage.
- The policy should expressly prohibit facial recognition, biometric analysis, artificial intelligence review, or other automated processing of recordings unless such use is specifically authorized through a transparent public process (which we don't have) with appropriate safeguards.

- I know it was discussed that this wouldn't be used.
- Clear retention schedules, auditing requirements, access controls, and review procedures should be established to protect both accountability and individual privacy.
- Independent civilian oversight should be meaningfully addressed as part of the implementation framework, including how oversight responsibilities will be carried out and how access to relevant information will be ensured.
 - Which we don't have!
- The City should continue providing robust, accessible, and inclusive opportunities for public engagement, including outreach to residents with disabilities, immigrant communities, communities of color, and other residents most likely to be affected by this technology to get the solutions they may have more than what might be in the City's hands.

Conclusion: Governing Technology Through Accountability and Trust

The decision before the Council is not only about purchasing and deploying a new technology. It is about how Somerville chooses to govern that technology. We don't have this information! The cameras themselves are only one part of the equation. The policies, safeguards, oversight structures, and accountability mechanisms surrounding them will determine whether they strengthen public trust.

Again, trust is earned through transparent decision-making, meaningful community participation, independent oversight, and policies that protect both public safety and civil liberties.

I respectfully ask the Administration to ensure that outstanding questions regarding oversight, transparency, privacy, and accountability are fully addressed as part of the implementation process. The rights at stake belong to every resident of Somerville, and they deserve a process that is thoughtful, transparent, accountable, and worthy of the public's trust. DO NOT MAKE A VOTE TONIGHT!

Please don't rush this. We deserve to the accountability and adherence to our rights. There needs to be a proper public hearing and not one that ensures a vote because of absence but because resident engagement is important.

I want to thank the task forces, the community groups, legal and professional and national organizations, local committees and commissions, civilian groups and independent researchers I referenced and contacted with my questions, for all they do, and contributing to the well-being of our communities.

I'm sharing this in good faith and welcome any correction if I have described anything inaccurately.

Respectfully,

Elyse Best
Ward 3 Resident
Somerville, Massachusetts

Madalyn Letellier

From: Elyse Best [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, July 27, 2026 11:30 AM
To: Public Comments
Subject: Public Statement for June 27th Public Hearing BWCs
Attachments: PUBLIC STATEMENT- 7:27 Public Hearing.pdf

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
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Hello,

I am resubmitting my public comment this with some edits and corrects.

Thank you.
Elyse Best