

## Madalyn Letellier

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**From:** Struhl, Ben [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Thursday, June 25, 2026 5:13 PM  
**To:** Public Comments  
**Subject:** Public Comment on Body-worn Cameras from Public Safety for All Task Force Member  
**Attachments:** Statement on Body Worn Cameras Somerville Struhl.docx

**Follow Up Flag:** Follow up  
**Flag Status:** Flagged

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Hello,

Attached is my public comment on body-worn camera's for Council's consideration. I am commenting on Council's consideration of adopting a body-worn camera program.

I am:

Ben Struhl  
[REDACTED] (Ward 5)

Thank you,

Ben Struhl

## Statement on Proposed Body-Worn Cameras in Somerville

Ben Struhl  
Executive Director  
University of Pennsylvania  
Crime and Justice Policy Lab  
Ward 5 Somerville Resident  
6/24/2026

Thanks so much for taking the time to consider this issue.

As way of brief background, I run the Crime and Justice Policy Lab at the University of Pennsylvania, where I advise mayors in cities like Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Oakland on how to reform criminal justice systems, reduce incarceration, and reduce violence. I'm also really fortunate that UPenn allows me to do this job as a resident of Somerville—I've lived here since 2011 and I try to stay involved locally, for example by sitting on the city's Public Safety for All Task Force.

I've already talked to some of you about what we know about the research behind body-worn cameras. We're at a point in our knowledge of body-worn cameras where it is really clear that these programs are valuable—Tanisha Sullivan of the Boston NAACP told me that there is really no question that cameras are important and should be adopted. I've also cautioned some of you that it's important to look at the specific camera policies when considering this program. The good news up front is that I've seen the proposed policies, and they make me very confident in the proposed Somerville program.

But cameras also come with a real budgetary cost in a difficult year, and I've heard a lot of valuable questions from Council as they consider the costs and benefits of the program. I appreciate that Council is carefully considering the issue, so I wanted to briefly discuss more about what we know about body-worn cameras, including body-worn cameras in the Somerville context. I also think it's valuable to emphasize the community feedback I've gotten about body-worn cameras as a part of the Public Safety for All Task Force, and working with the Civilian Oversight Task Force—the response from the community has been overwhelmingly in favor of adopting the program.

### **What the research tells us**

I will give a short summary of the research on body-worn cameras, although I'd be happy to answer questions from anyone looking for more detail.

I'm going to mainly discuss the research in Boston, which my lab was involved in. My lab joined an effort led by colleagues at the NAACP and the ACLU to convince the City of Boston to adopt body-worn cameras.

The headline of the research is that looking at all the messy implementations of body-worn cameras across the country, cameras have shown a consistent effect of reducing citizen complaints against the police. Looking at Boston—which had a more solid implementation of cameras—shows cameras not only reducing citizen complaints but also officer use of force. This project faced heavy resistance from the Boston Police Union, so the lab initially studied the cameras in a one-year pilot of 100 officers using the cameras. Over the course of the year the cameras prevented 10 use of force instances and officers using the cameras generated 19 fewer complaints. These results convinced the city to launch the program citywide.

My colleagues at the Institute for Race and Justice also interviewed people who used the cameras in court—*both* prosecutors and defense attorneys said they believed the cameras led to more just legal outcomes.

This research out of Boston is in line with the vast body of other research studies about body-worn cameras.

My colleague Morgan Williams, an economist who studies racial inequality in the police, did a cost-benefit analysis of body-worn cameras. He found that body-worn cameras have on average \$5 in benefit for every \$1 of cost spent. To be clear, this benefit tries to put a dollar value on harms prevented such as fatal or non-fatal use of force.

But looking at city budgets directly, Morgan found that in many cities body-worn cameras also pay for themselves. In a city like Boston that prevented 19 citizen complaints, the costs associated with those complaints (and any payout the city might make) could have paid the cost of running the program.

Still, despite the strong evidence of cameras being an effective program, there is still some skepticism about the details—and I think that skepticism is healthy. The body of research around body-worn cameras is actually not on an ideal set of policies—a lot of the programs studied really weren't great when it came to the specifics, but still had positive and beneficial effects. But it is my sense from working on this that the specifics behind this program really matter. It seems obvious to me that a city could negate the benefits of cameras if, for example, officers never had to turn their cameras on, or footage was never available for review. So, it's important to look at the specifics of the Somerville program.

## **What we know in Somerville**

The great headline here is that the Somerville policy is in line with our understanding of best practices. I asked one of our legal analysts at UPenn to compare the proposed Somerville body-worn camera policy with the State Body Camera Task Force recommendation. The state task force, which was made up of law enforcement, the ACLU, the NAACP, and the public defenders association, put together a really great and thorough set of recommendations on how cities should implement body-worn cameras, and Somerville has broadly followed all of those regulations. That should give us more confidence that body-worn cameras will be valuable in Somerville.

I know another local area of consideration is the difficult budget year, and the tradeoffs that are involved in paying for the operation of body-worn cameras. It is worth noting that Somerville should see some direct cost savings from camera adoption, although it won't see as much benefit as a city like Boston due to the fact Somerville, happily, has a really low rate of citizen complaints. From the research I was able to do, Somerville has paid an average of about \$66,000 annually to settle citizen complaints around excessive force from SPD. Based on the research, Somerville could expect to save some of that money if it adopted body-worn cameras.

There are some ways in which Somerville is really fortunate—for example, we have very little officer use of force in the city. Compared to Boston, we have less potential benefits from the cameras because we're starting from a much better place. But, it's worth remembering that our neighboring cities like Medford and Cambridge have adopted body-worn cameras because there are clear benefits to the program that are hard to put a price on.

## **What citizens say in Somerville**

I've had the pleasure of talking to countless citizens during my time working on the Public Safety for All Task Force, and I also worked closely with the Civilian Oversight Task Force. The members of the public who I've talked to all feel enthusiastic about body-worn cameras—all of them think it can help. They advance important values such as transparency and accountability. They give the potential for police to actually review past incidents to look for how they can improve their interaction with citizens—it would be especially helpful if we could get trained clinicians reviewing footage around mental health incidents, something Chief Benford said SPD could do with in-service training hours.

And, body-worn cameras give civilian oversight a chance to be meaningful along one important dimension—without camera footage, what information would a civilian oversight function have to work off of?

I know at least one other member of the Public Safety for All Task Force will be speaking to citizen opinions in the city, but I have my own normative take as a longtime city resident: Cambridge suffered a massive human cost in the shooting of Sayed Faisal in 2023, and lack of body-worn camera footage meant the community has spent a long time in continued anguish and division, wondering what happened. That type of uncertainty brings its own enormous cost to a city, and it's something I really don't want to see in Somerville.

The cost of this program is real, but this program will never be cheaper for the city given the state money on the table. Given the clear benefits of the program and the broad community support in favor, I would urge Council to approve adopting the body-worn camera program.

## Madalyn Letellier

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**From:** Almonte, Carolina <[REDACTED]>  
**Sent:** Thursday, June 25, 2026 5:21 PM  
**To:** Public Comments  
**Subject:** Public Comment on Body-worn Cameras from Somerville Civilian Oversight Task Force Member  
**Attachments:** Ltr to Somerville Council - Bodyworn Cameras.pdf  
**Follow Up Flag:** Follow up  
**Flag Status:** Flagged

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Good evening,

Please see my public comment attached.

Thank you!  
Carolina

**Carolina Almonte, Esq.**

[\(Hear name\)](#)

**Executive Director**

[HRC, CIRC, & PRAB](#)

[REDACTED] Floor

Cambridge, MA 02139

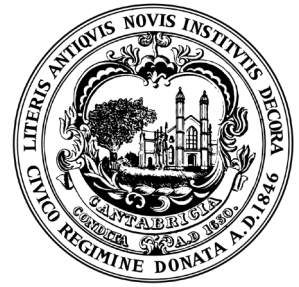
Phone: [REDACTED]

Pronouns: She/her/hers

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**PRAB**  
Police Review  
and Advisory  
Board



June 26, 2026

Somerville City Council  
City of Somerville  
93 Highland Avenue  
Somerville, MA 02143

Re: Letter of Support for Body-Worn Camera Implementation

Dear Members of the Somerville City Council:

I am writing in support of the City of Somerville’s efforts to implement a body-worn camera program as part of its broader public safety and police accountability work. I had the privilege of serving as a member of Somerville’s Civilian Oversight Task Force, and I remain deeply invested in the City’s continued efforts to establish a meaningful and effective system of civilian oversight. I currently serve as the Executive Director of the Cambridge Human Rights Commission, Commission on Immigrant Rights and Citizenship, and Police Review and Advisory Board (“PRAB”). In that role, I oversee Cambridge’s civilian police oversight process and have seen firsthand how access to objective evidence can strengthen the fair and thorough review of complaints involving police conduct.

In Cambridge, the Police Department (“CPD”) began rolling out its body-worn camera program in March 2025, after a procurement, testing, and policy-development process. The program includes equipment, storage, maintenance, and related implementation needs, and body-worn cameras are now part of CPD’s accountability infrastructure. Although still a relatively new program, body-worn camera footage has already become a helpful tool for PRAB in furthering its mission of civilian oversight, transparency, and accountability.

A central challenge in police accountability work is the ability to fairly and accurately assess what occurred during an interaction between law enforcement and a member of the public. Body-worn camera footage can provide a more complete record of those interactions. These small, wearable devices not only capture video footage but also audio recordings, offering a more complete picture. This benefits community members, officers, investigators, and oversight bodies alike. It can help resolve complaints more efficiently, clarify disputed facts, identify concerning conduct or patterns, and support fair outcomes.

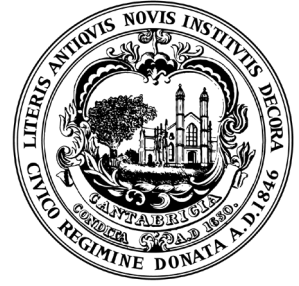
Body-worn cameras also strengthen the effectiveness of civilian oversight. A police review board is only as strong as the information available to it. When oversight bodies have access to relevant evidence,



# CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

## PRAB

Police Review  
and Advisory  
Board



including video and audio footage where appropriate, they are better positioned to review complaints, identify systemic issues, and recommend improvements to policy, training, and practice.

In addition, body-worn cameras can have a positive impact on the broader community by reinforcing the principle that public safety work should be visible and accountable to the public. Communities are more likely to trust accountability systems when they know there are mechanisms in place to independently examine police conduct. That trust is especially important for residents who may already feel vulnerable, over-policed, or hesitant to report concerns. For officers, body-worn cameras can also provide protection against inaccurate complaints and help document the realities of difficult public safety work.

For these reasons, I believe that the implementation of body-worn cameras will have a net positive impact on Somerville's public safety and accountability efforts. Body-worn cameras are quickly becoming standard-issued equipment for police officers throughout the United States. It will support fairer investigations once an oversight entity is established in Somerville and help build public confidence in the systems designed to serve and protect the community.

I respectfully encourage the City Council to support this important step forward.

Sincerely,

Carolina Almonte, Esq.

[REDACTED]  
Cambridge, MA 02139

Executive Director

Police Review & Advisory Board

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

## Madalyn Letellier

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**From:** Marea Beeman [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Friday, June 26, 2026 1:07 PM  
**To:** Public Comments  
**Subject:** Public Comment on Body-Worn Cameras from Civilian Oversight Task Force Member  
**Attachments:** Letter to Council re BWC.pdf

**Follow Up Flag:** Follow up  
**Flag Status:** Flagged

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Hello,

Please find attached a letter to City Council members about implementation of the use of body-worn cameras by the Somerville Police Department.

Please contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,  
Marea Beeman  
Ward 3

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Marea L. Beeman, Esq.  
[REDACTED], Somerville, MA 02143  
[REDACTED]

June 26, 2026

Members of the City Council  
Somerville City Hall  
93 Highland Avenue  
Somerville, MA 02143

Honorable Members of the Somerville City Council:

I am writing to express my support for release of the state grant funds that will enable the City of Somerville to finally implement use of body-worn cameras by the Somerville Police Department (SPD). I believe body-worn cameras are an important tool for increasing accountability, enhancing transparency, building community trust, and supporting the fairness and integrity of the criminal legal system.

I am a Ward 3 Somerville resident who served on the City's Civilian Oversight Task Force as part of the Public Safety for All community process. In its 2025 report, the Task Force made recommendations regarding creation of a police accountability entity tailored to our community's needs. As I understand it, the City is moving forward with establishment of such an entity. Access to body-camera footage will be enormously valuable to that body in reviewing individual complaints, identifying policy and practice issues, and facilitating informed conversations with the community about the SPD.

My support for body-worn cameras stems also from my experience as a criminal defense attorney in Middlesex County courts. Some of my cases originated in jurisdictions, including Cambridge and at the Encore casino, in which officers use body cameras. Others originated in jurisdictions that do not use body cameras. From the standpoint of accuracy and fairness, it is far preferable when body-camera footage is available.

In some of my cases, police reports alleged conduct that body-camera footage later revealed to be inaccurate or incomplete, resulting in charges being dismissed. In other cases, footage contradicted a client's account of events. In either circumstance, video evidence helped establish what actually occurred and promoted confidence in the integrity of the judicial process.

The grant funding would support an initial implementation among supervisory officers. A phased approach offers an opportunity for SPD personnel to gain experience with the technology and its benefits while laying the groundwork for broader adoption in the future.

p. 2

City leaders have discussed issues relating to police accountability, transparency, and implementation of body-worn cameras for years. This grant provides a meaningful opportunity to move from discussion to action. And in this challenging budget year, I urge the Council to release the grant and take advantage of the state funds before the opportunity is lost.


Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Marea L. Beeman, Esq.

*Marea L. Beeman*

Ward 3

  
Somerville, MA 02143

## Madalyn Letellier

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**From:** St. Louis, Ermus [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Monday, June 29, 2026 1:34 PM  
**To:** Public Comments  
**Subject:** Public Comment on Body-worn Cameras from Somerville Civilian Oversight Task Force Member  
**Attachments:** Support Letter \_ BWCs for Somerville.pdf  
**Follow Up Flag:** Follow up  
**Flag Status:** Flagged

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Dear Somerville City Council,

Please see the attachment for my public comment regarding the proposed implementation of body-worn cameras in the Somerville Police Department. I respectfully request that this letter be included as part of the public record for Council consideration.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Ermus,

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Ermus St. Louis, Ph.D.  
Assistant Professor  
School of Criminology & Criminal Justice, and  
Affiliate Assistant Professor of Africana Studies  
Northeastern University  
Boston Mass 02115  
[REDACTED]

**Dear Mayor Wilson, Members of the City Council, and Members of the Somerville Community,**

My name is Ermus St. Louis, and I am an Assistant Professor in the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Northeastern University. My research generally looks at policing, focusing particularly on technology, reform, decision-making, and police–community relations. I previously served on Somerville's Civilian Oversight Task Force (COTF). Please accept this letter as my strong support for the city's efforts to implement a department-wide body-worn camera (BWC) program and to secure the necessary funding for its implementation.

Since their official introduction in policing a little more than a decade ago, it has become clear that BWCs are not a panacea to the relational challenges facing modern policing. The technology will not, by itself, eliminate misconduct, resolve longstanding tensions between police and communities, or automatically boost public trust. What these cameras can do, however, is increase visibility of police encounters and create a reliable record of officer-civilian interactions, one that can improve documentation, support resolution of complaints, and assist in criminal investigations. Much like previously adopted technologies, BWCs themselves do not, cannot, and will not make police more accountable. Increasing accountability through BWCs requires sound governance structures, oversight systems, and policies. Strong policies about who can access recordings, how they are reviewed, when they are released to the public, how long videos are kept, how compliance is monitored, and how success is measured are often more important than the physical technology itself.

This is one reason I am convinced that BWCs fit naturally within Somerville's broader effort to strengthen public safety and oversight of institutions charged with the public's safety and well-being. The COTF's report stressed that meaningful transparency, access to information, community engagement, and independent review are critical elements of effective oversight. The report also emphasized the significance of the oversight body having access to BWC footage if the police department eventually establishes such a program.

For this reason, I contend that BWCs should not be treated as a stand-alone reform. The technology is just one component of the broader accountability network that the city is committed to improving. This network includes public transparency, policy review, community inclusion, in addition to civilian oversight. Even though these commitments can be strengthened through BWCs, they cannot be replaced by the technology. From my perspective, the cameras are a key part of Somerville's larger project to reimagine public safety. They are not a separate endeavor.

Understandably, the financial burden and possible haphazard implementation of BWCs have raised concerns among members of the community and City Council. It is widely acknowledged that operating a successful BWC program demands a great deal of resources to support training, supervision, data storage and management, and oversight. While these concerns are reasonable, it would be unreasonable to use them as justifications for opposing the implementation of BWCs. What these concerns instead suggest is that BWC implementation must be thoughtful and guided by evidence-based practices. The city has already established a sound BWC policy, taken steps to secure funding, and engaged relevant stakeholders and experts throughout this process. These measures are signs that Somerville is committed to rolling out the cameras in a manner consistent with evidence-based best practices.

Through my service on the COTF, I learned that community members and officers of all ranks generally

support the adoption of BWCs, seeing the technology as a tool that can serve the mutual interests of both groups. However, that potential is only realized when BWCs are embedded within strong oversight structures and clear governance policies. Somerville has spent years looking into how public safety can be strengthened and how accountability can be improved. BWCs are not a cure-all, but their evidentiary value can contribute to a more transparent and accountable public safety system.

For these reasons, I respectfully encourage the City Council to support the acceptance of this funding and allow the city to continue moving forward with the thoughtful implementation of its BWC program.

Sincerely,

Ermus St. Louis, Ph.D.  
Assistant Professor Criminology and Criminal Justice, and  
Affiliate Assistant Professor of Africana Studies  
Northeastern University



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'ES'.

## Madalyn Letellier

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**From:** Brian Schaffner [REDACTED] >  
**Sent:** Monday, June 29, 2026 2:19 PM  
**To:** Public Comments  
**Subject:** Public Comment on Body-worn Cameras from Somerville Civilian Oversight Task Force Member  
**Attachments:** schaffner\_public\_comment.docx

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Please find my public comment attached.

Thank you.  
Brian Schaffner

Subject: Public Comment on Body-worn Cameras from Somerville Civilian Oversight Task Force Member

Dear Honorable Members of the Somerville City Council:

I am writing as both a resident of Somerville and as a member of the Civilian Oversight Task Force, to which I was appointed as a subject expert based on my work as a professor at Tufts University. Based on my expertise, my experiences with the task force, and my own perspective as a Somerville resident, I am strongly in favor of the city implementing body worn cameras for its police force. This is an especially opportune time to do so, since much of the start-up cost will be covered by the grant the city won for implementation. I support implementing this reform immediately for the following reasons.

First, as a member of the Civilian Oversight Task Force, I spent significant time and energy learning about policing reforms and what does and does not work when it comes to civilian oversight. Perhaps the most important lesson from this work was that civilian oversight boards are only effective when they have access to tools that facilitate oversight. Body worn cameras are just such a tool. Without access to the footage that body worn cameras can provide, any civilian oversight board would find it much more difficult to investigate complaints about police actions.

Second, and perhaps more importantly, the benefits of body worn cameras go far beyond the footage they provide for any particular incident. As a social scientist, I have followed the research on this question, and several high quality randomized experiments show that cameras can change how officers behave. For example, when body worn cameras were introduced in certain precincts in New York City, officers in those precincts vastly increased the number of stop reports they filed. This showed that their awareness of the cameras encouraged them to comply with the rules requiring them to file a report for any stop they made.

Third, your constituents believe that body worn cameras are effective and should be mandated. In 2020, I fielded and analyzed a representative survey of Somerville residents as part of a project funded by Tisch College at Tufts University where I am a professor. That survey shows that 87% of Somerville residents think that body worn cameras are somewhat or very effective in reducing deadly interactions with officers. Based on the Cooperative Election Survey, an annual survey that I direct, 90% of residents in Middlesex County support requiring police officers to use body worn cameras. There is almost no issue I poll on that receives this level of overwhelming support across the political and social spectrum. I know that policy making is complex

and involves dealing with tradeoffs that are difficult to fully capture in polls of the public, but I think it is clear what your constituents want on this issue.

I understand that even with the significant grant funding that has been acquired there are costs associated with implementing body worn cameras and that those costs come at a time when the city government is having to make budget cuts. But as a resident of Somerville who cares deeply about both public safety and social justice, I think those costs are trivial compared to the benefits that body worn cameras will have for the community. And if costs are a concern, then it seems especially important to implement this policy now, when the city can take advantage of this significant grant funding rather than waiting until some unfortunate incident forces a much costlier unsubsidized adoption.

Thank you for your time.

Brian Schaffner

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

## Madalyn Letellier

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**From:** Kimberly J L Pitts [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, June 30, 2026 10:20 AM  
**To:** All City Council; Public Comments  
**Subject:** Public Comment on Body-worn Cameras from Public Safety for All Task Force Member

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[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Somerville MA 02143

United States

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

June 29, 2026

Somerville City Councilors

Dear Councilors,

It has come to my attention as a member of the Public Safety For All Task Force that a grant was secured, in the amount of \$231K to be used to implement the body cams that we recommended for use by the SPD.

Upon hearing the news of the grant, initially I was hopeful that our city would gladly move forward, especially since SPD Officers seem to have agreed through the union's bargaining negotiations that they are willing to wear them. Yet, I am now aware that there seems to be an issue with you city councilors having a discussion and putting the matter of the acceptance of the grant up to a vote before you adjourn for the summer.

Let me say this clearly: after our Task Force and others put in almost 3 years of work, this being an important issue regarding public safety, you can't find the time to discuss

this issue and put it to a vote before the grant expires in August?

That is not acceptable! All we ever hear when it comes to programs that would help improve the safety of all citizens and officers in this city is, "We don't have the money to implement this," and now you do and you all don't feel the need to act upon making sure that it is discussed during the July 9th meeting? It needs to be placed on the agenda of items to be discussed and voted on without hesitation. Do the job that we constituents have elected you to do. I, for one, am absolutely sick and tired of lip service being paid to issues that are of deep concern to us constituents and then nothing is really done under the guise of affordability and budget, etc. ENOUGH!

Now, before you respond with the fiscal issues surrounding the city, and yes, I am aware there have been budget cuts leading to layoffs , this is a necessity that needs to get done and rolled out for the overall well-being of our city.

And yes, I am aware that the grant may not cover the monies officers have to be paid to wear the cameras in addition to their regular salaries. Now, how I feel about that is a discussion for another day, but I am looking at the bigger picture here. Would you rather pay during the trial run, or would you rather they not, and god forbid there is an

accusation of police misconduct and it ends up costing our city millions?!!! We need to act upon all of the rhetoric spoken during campaigns about a safe city. As a constituent

on the task force, we put in many hours of work, and I, for one, do not want to see that work done in vain. You put these task forces together to help all of us better understand what would make Somerville an even better place to live, and I need to see some proactive action in this matter. And I know Chief Benford is on board to do all he can to see that Somerville Police Department and the community have a positive relationship that is transparent and done with integrity.

Sincerely yours,



## Madalyn Letellier

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**From:** Jonah Abrams [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, June 30, 2026 11:25 AM  
**To:** Public Comments; All City Council  
**Subject:** Support for police body cameras program

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City Council,

I understand there is a committee meeting tonight to discuss implementing police body cameras. I am writing to voice my support for that program.

The national conversation around race and policing in 2020 taught the country, and Somerville specifically, important lessons about police transparency and accountability. Unfortunately, some in our community and our city government have twisted those lessons into general opposition to policing. I understand those attitudes may be driving some resistance to the body camera program today, given the additional resource investment in policing that it may entail.

Opposing a real opportunity at police transparency based on a misguided hostility towards policing would truly be cutting off one's nose to spite one's face. I have been very vocal in my communications with the city about the need for an increased police presence and an increased commitment to law and order, particularly in Davis Square, but even I can recognize that my priorities and the valuable lessons of the last few years are not mutually exclusive.

I intend to continue being vocal about law and order, but in the meantime, I urge the city council to be reasonable, to be practical, and to seize on a real and meaningful opportunity by adopting this body camera program.

Thanks,  
Jonah Abrams

Sent from my iPhone

## Madalyn Letellier

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**From:** Mason Kortz [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, June 30, 2026 12:31 PM  
**To:** Public Comments; All City Council  
**Subject:** Comment re: Body Worn Cameras

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Dear Council Members -

I understand that the City of Somerville is deliberating policies related to body worn cameras and, as part of this, right to access footage by the public. As a former Somerville resident (and current Cambridge resident who often visits Somerville), public safety and local accountability are both issues I care about deeply. I am also a Clinical Instructor at the Harvard Cyberlaw Clinic, where I run our public transparency docket. As an attorney who has represented community members, journalists, and nonprofits in public records cases, I have strong views on the use of the Public Records Law as a mechanism for access to body worn camera footage.

As I often tell my students, there can be a gap between the law and legal reality. In the case of public records requests, there are often hurdles that requestors must overcome to obtain records they are entitled to: delayed responses, confusing exemptions, and even refusal by municipalities and agencies to comply with orders from the Supervisor of Records. Accordingly, designating body worn camera footage as a public record does not fully address concerns about access and accountability. I urge the Council to listen to the voices of Somerville residents who are asking for stronger access provisions to such footage. In my professional and personal opinion, streamlined access to footage would better serve the dual goals of improving public safety and maintaining police accountability.

Thank you for your consideration of this point. Please do not hesitate to reach out if I can assist by providing additional information.

Sincerely,

Mason A. Kortz

## Madalyn Letellier

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**From:** Myles Herbert <[REDACTED]>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, June 30, 2026 12:50 PM  
**To:** All City Council  
**Cc:** Public Comments  
**Subject:** Public Comment Concerning Body Worn Camera Implementation

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Dear Esteemed Members of the Somerville City Council,

I am a former Somerville resident and member of the now complete Civilian Oversight Task Force. I am writing to urge the City Council to slow down the implementation of police body-worn cameras (BWCs) and reject attempts by the administration and police department to jam this policy through without rigorous oversight and public input.

Technology without strict, binding policy is not accountability, it is just expanded surveillance. If we do not get the policy right before deployment, we fail our community. The Council must assert its authority to ensure operational protocols, strict activation mandates, and severe penalties for officer non-compliance are fully finalized and publicly debated before this moves forward.

Furthermore, I am vehemently opposed to treating BWC footage merely as a standard public record under current frameworks.

As a resident, I have been repeatedly stonewalled and ignored when submitting public records requests to the City of Somerville. Over the past few years, widespread reporting has made it clear that Massachusetts has the worst public records laws in the country, and Somerville is among the absolute worst offenders for public records obfuscation.

If BWC footage falls under this broken system, the city and police will maintain a monopoly on the narrative, withholding incriminating footage while selectively releasing what suits them. We cannot allow the entity being monitored to control the evidence.

The public must own this footage. We need a policy that bypasses the city's broken public records process and establishes true public ownership, with mandatory, independent disclosure protocols for critical incidents.

Do not let the administration and police department rush you into a bad process. Please slow this down, demand real legislative oversight, and insist on a policy where the public, not the police, owns the data.

In community,

Myles Herbert

## Madalyn Letellier

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**From:** Piston, Spencer [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, June 30, 2026 5:39 PM  
**To:** Public Comments; All City Council  
**Subject:** police body camera policy considerations

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To the Members of the Somerville City Council:

My name is Spencer Piston, Associate Professor of Political Science and Director of the Politics and Policy Research Laboratory (PPRL) at Boston University. PPRL conducts analyses of policies and policy proposals in order to improve the functioning of democratic governance and the efforts of democratic social movements.

It has come to PPRL's attention that Somerville is considering adopting body cameras for local police officers. We therefore have conducted a preliminary analysis of proposed and existing body camera policy. Our analysis suggests that when compared to other jurisdictions across the country, proposed and existing body camera policy in Somerville lags behind best practices.

I am available for further discussion if you are interested.

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First, some little-known historical background: Body cameras were originally proposed not by police reformers but by corporate vendors who saw them as a revenue opportunity. As Alec Karatsanis writes, "Police and their corporate contractors had a problem: They were unable to get local governments to spend the billions of dollars needed to outfit every cop in the U.S. with a mobile surveillance camera that the cops themselves would control. Local police bureaucracies and carceral tech companies were also unable to procure the public money to fulfill their dream...How did they do it?...[T]hey portrayed Orwellian government surveillance infrastructure as a "reform" for police violence..."

The downsides of body cameras, as has become crystal clear in recent years, are manifold. For example, they require massive public expenditures to obtain and maintain, expenditures that flow into the pockets of large, for-profit companies whose responsibility is to shareholders rather than members of the public. What is more, body cameras dramatically expand the power of police to criminalize, through extending police surveillance capacities, while also insulating police from not only civil liability but also democratic accountability.

The reason for fissures in democratic accountability is that in many jurisdictions police control body cameras, determining what is filmed (and what isn't), when it is filmed (and when it isn't), what footage is released (if any) and when it is released (if ever) – often edited and narrated by police agencies' public relations firms. Taken together, these forms of police control over body cameras expand rather than contract the power of the police vis-à-vis the public.

To address these problems, many jurisdictions across the country have developed policies intended to make body cameras more responsive to their intended purpose of democratic accountability. Here we will address just one of these: police review policies.

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Police review policies regulate whether an individual police officer is allowed to review body camera footage before making a statement or writing a report. Such policies are critical to the project of police accountability. As The Brennan Center for Justice writes: “From a police accountability perspective, in a case where an officer did use force inappropriately or where there is a discrepancy between accounts, permitting an officer to view the video before making a statement might be problematic since it would allow him to tailor his statement to fit the evidence.”

In Somerville, one difficulty is that the language across policy documents is not consistent. More important, each of these documents articulates a proposed or existing policy that falls well short of standards set to achieve accountability objectives.

Consider the following proposal presented by the body camera Surveillance Technology Impact Report (STIR): “If an officer uses deadly force that results in a fatality, the officer may not view the footage absent approval of the Middlesex District Attorney’s Office.”

The Somerville Police Superior Officers Association (SPSOA)’s collectively bargained agreement, meanwhile, reads as follows: “Following an officer-involved use of deadly force, whether or not fatal, officers and supervisors at the scene before and during such use of force shall not view any BWC recording from the scene without authorization from the Chief or designee and the District Attorney’s Office as set forth in subsection (b) and (c) below.”

In the case of the proposal’s STIR, the policy would require “a fatality” for the restriction on viewing footage to apply, while in the case of the SPSOA’s collective bargaining agreement, the restriction applies any time “deadly force” is used, “whether or not fatal.”

Inconsistencies aside, “deadly force” is a remarkably small category. According to the Somerville Police Department’s policy on “Use of Force,” all of the following are classified as examples of “Non-Deadly Force”: “the use of approved defensive/physical tactics, approved chemical substances (i.e., O.C.),

Taser (Electronic Control Weapon), restraint devices, and baton” – even while such “non-deadly force” could in fact kill someone. In 2024, for example, Public Broadcasting Services and the Associated Press reported on 1036 instances in which people were killed by police through the use of so-called “less-lethal force.” In any case, why should non-fatal police violence be exempted from regulatory procedures intended to promote democratic accountability?

What is more, even within the narrow subset of circumstances in which restrictions do apply, the restrictions can be lifted by other law enforcement agents: the chief of police (or someone whom the chief designates) or the district attorney. In sum, Somerville restrictions on police review of body camera footage are anemic.

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Other jurisdictions fare better. To be clear, in many cases, as University of Massachusetts Hillary Farber observes, “Police officers and their unions have pushed for “prereview” policies, which allow officers to check their memories against BWC footage before writing incident reports.” However, “pre-review policies erode both accuracy and accountability rather than enhancing them.” Among the many reasons for this is that “An officer’s memory of an incident is susceptible to being altered by details in the footage that the officer may not have noticed or remembered.”

It is perhaps for these reasons that, as Professor Farber observes, “many police departments prohibit officers from reviewing BWC footage before writing an incident report in use-of-force cases.” This has been the case for some time. In 2017, for example, a report authored by Upturn and The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights identified thirteen jurisdictions that restrict officers’ ability to review body camera footage. For example, in Oakland, California, the police department’s policy at that time specified that after any “Level 1” “use of force” incident, “No personnel involved in or a witness to the incident may view any audio/video recordings prior to being interviewed by the appropriate investigative unit and receiving command approval.” This policy is hardly airtight, but it applies to a wider range of situations than the Somerville policy. In addition, its restrictions cannot be lifted by other law enforcement agents.

As Professor Farber argues, “the adoption of BWCs raised hopes that the cameras would increase transparency and accountability in policing. But without good policies to govern their use, BWCs may achieve little of either.” At present, Somerville’s proposed and existing police review regulations fall short of this standard.

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