

Bureau of Justice Assistance
Chief Gregory Zyburt Body-Worn Camera Interview
6/17/2015

MICHAEL ROOSA: Hi, I'm Mike Roosa, Senior Policy Advisor at the Bureau of Justice Assistance and today I'm speaking with Chief Greg Zyburt, as part of BJA's, Body-Worn Camera podcast series. Chief Zyburt is the Chief of Police in the Charter Township of Chocolay, in Michigan's upper peninsula.

He's been in law enforcement in the rural communities in Marquette County, Michigan for over 35 years. As the Chief in Chocolay Township, he instituted the use of Body-Worn Cameras for his officers in 2008, often wearing one himself. Chief Zyburt, thank you for speaking with me today.

To start, can you discuss the challenges you encountered when implementing Body-Worn Cameras in a rural community?

CHIEF GREGORY ZYBURT: Sure. Mike, Chocolay Township is a rural community in the upper peninsula. We describe it as a bedroom community of Marquette, Michigan, which is the largest city in the upper peninsula, about 25,000. Our population is about 7,000 people and it's along the shores of Lake Superior.

It's kind of unique for a township in the upper peninsula to actually have a police department, and I think because of the lake shore, we have the bigger homes, and they're able to afford the taxes to pay for a police department. One of the things in the township that we have, is a casino.

And in the state of Michigan, the casinos are required to donate two percent of the proceeds that they make to the local municipalities. So, we're fortunate enough to get a quarterly check which helped pay for this specific body camera program that I instituted, you know, seven, eight years ago.

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MICHAEL ROOSA: So, that's some of the funding, so when you're creating your program, what other resources did you use, say research and develop and, and other funds for this effort?

CHIEF GREGORY ZYBURT: You know, we really didn't, we really didn't have many challenges, it was so new, and we had to make up a wish list of what we would like to purchase for our department.

I was going through different police magazines and I saw these body-worn mics, I thought, you know, every once in awhile, we get these allegations of officer misconduct and that type of thing, and I thought what better way to fight these things, to start video recording. So, I purchased two or three of them, I got the okay from the township board, and I purchased them, and started with that, trial and error, and we really haven't had that many challenges.

MICHAEL ROOSA: So, the wish list is always useful to have in your pocket when the funding is available. So, really you developed your policy after implementation.

Which groups did you work with when you were developing your Body-Worn Camera policy?

CHIEF GREGORY ZYBURT: Well, we really didn't have a policy for the first two or three years. We used it pretty much anytime we had contact with the public. After a few years, speaking with our risk managers, the insurance companies and that type of thing, and they recommended that we adopt some type of policy and we worked with them on that.

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In fact, they, they were so impressed over the, especially of the last three or four years, that they now fund half of the purchase of any cameras that our department buys.

MICHAEL ROOSA: That's great. The - again, another funding source, always important to find. So, once you started your policy development, how long would you say it took to fully develop your policy?

CHIEF GREGORY ZYBURT: I would say we worked with them and they were - it was trial and error checking out. I would say probably over a year period, and that was after the probably third or fourth year that we were actually had been using them already.

MICHAEL ROOSA: The inclusion is always a good one. So, now that you're at this point, you've developed your policy and you've been implemented for a long time, you're certainly a good example, what advice would you give to other rural communities considering the implementation of the Body-Worn Camera program?

CHIEF GREGORY ZYBURT: Well, I would say go for it. I'll tell you, it, as far as the problems of officer misconduct or any of that type of thing, it took care of the problem.

You know, when I had the people come in, I invited them in to come watch the video. First of all they were taken-a-back that there was a video. We are one of the states, we don't require, only one party has to know that recording is being activated. So, we didn't even let them know that they were being recorded and they were astonished when they found out that we had a video of, you know, the traffic stop or the different proceedings.

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But I would say, you know, go for it, only because it makes a good police officer better. If you're being video recorded, you're not going to do stupid things, and if that person, and we do let them know now, that they're being video recorded, because it's in the news so much, but if they know they're being video recorded, they're, quite often, you know, not going to do the stupid things that they would have.

MICHAEL ROOSA: Good lessons learned. Earlier this year, you participated in BJA's expert panel on Body-Worn Cameras where there were representatives from small, medium, and large law enforcement agencies, what was your biggest take-away from the event?

CHIEF GREGORY ZYBURT: I think something that we've really never had to deal with, but it really stood out was the confidentiality. Not until the last two or so years did we actually start getting FOIR, or Freedom Of Information Requests, for the recordings.

And we really have no way of censoring the recordings, so it's very important not to give out any, you know, specific material on juveniles, CFC complaints, confidential informants, victims, and that type of thing. So, I think the one thing that really made me aware of what's confidentiality just who we give these different recordings out to and why.

MICHAEL ROOSA: If you were able, on that note, if you were able to implement your Body-Worn Camera program from scratch, based on what you've learned, how would you have done it differently, what changes would you have made?

CHIEF GREGORY ZYBURT: Well, I think for someone starting out, I would say make sure that you get a good policy right off the bat. Make sure that the people are recording any contact with the people, be it a traffic stop or an interview, and the,

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the other thing that we really didn't do, and we are now, is of course saving all of the different recordings.

And set up a schedule how long you're going to save them, and some things you'll save forever. So, I think probably setting up that policy and procedure right away.

MICHAEL ROOSA: Great. Thank you Chief Zyburt. We're grateful you could speak with us today to share your knowledge on BWC programs. We encourage law enforcement, justice, and public safety leaders whose agencies are interested in learning more about the implementation of Body-Worn Camera programs, to visit the Body-Worn Camera toolkit at www.bja.gov/bwc.

This toolkit offers a variety of resources that agencies can use to help with the adoption and use for community outreach, engagement, policy development, data collection, officer training and educational purposes. We also encourage listeners to share and promote these resources with your colleagues and staff.

Lastly, all of these resources and especially the Body-Worn Camera toolkit have been designed as a national resource, as your resource. Please submit your ideas for new content to the BWC support link at the bottom of the home page, or e-mail ask.bwc@usdoj.gov. Thank you, Chief Zyburt, appreciate your time. This is Mike Roosa at the Bureau of Justice Assistance signing off. Thanks for our listeners for joining us today. Have a good day.

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