

# NATIONAL REVIEW

## **Bursting the Bubble on the Idea of Cheap and Easy Police Body Cameras**

By Paul Crookston — September 13, 2016

Debates about police reform often generate more heat than light. One oft-repeated but less-examined claim is that officers could easily be held accountable through proper use of body cameras. Ignoring the costs of such a plan is part and parcel of presenting it as a panacea, but that is not an option for departments that have faced the challenges of implementing the policy.

The AP reports that many departments have run into serious problems — usually related to the storage of videos. In Clarksville, Ind., for example, the police can afford to store footage for 30 days. But a new state law now requires videos be stored for 190 days, which would bring costs as high as \$100,000 per year, thereby breaking the budget.

Large departments looking to introduce body cameras, in places like Oakland County, Mich., face startlingly high startup costs for cameras and storage that deter implementation. But medium-sized departments face a particular problem on video storage — they are too large to store video on servers they already have, while their budgets are not large enough to invest in upgraded storage systems. This makes body camera programs difficult to implement and maintain.

If the use of cameras were indeed a panacea, these high costs might well be worth it. But events in Milwaukee following the shooting of Sylville Smith in August by a police officer showed that, whatever partial role body cameras play in investigations into such incidents, they do not immediately appease the public's outrage. The footage obtained in the Smith case has not been released while the investigation is ongoing; riots have ensued in the meantime

It was an unjustifiably optimistic idea that body cameras would give the public a simple answer in these disputes. The reality is that they are an expensive and imperfect answer at best to the challenges of administering justice after violent confrontations involving police officers.