

## **Statement of the Problem**

Body-worn cameras are at the forefront of law enforcement discussion in the United States today. This innovative technology has the potential to provide greater security, transparency, and accountability to police officers and the community at-large. Seeing the benefits of body-worn cameras, the Wilkinson County Sheriff's Office implemented a limited body-worn camera program more than seven years ago. Wilkinson County is applying for this grant in order to significantly enhance their existing program through the purchase of 25 new body-worn cameras and a secure software system, better enabling the Sheriff's Office to meet its core objectives. Using funding from the Bureau of Justice Assistance, the Sheriff's Office intends to outfit all patrol and jail officers with body-worn cameras.

The Sheriff's Office began using body-worn cameras for patrol officers more than seven years ago. Seeing the need for a comprehensive policy regarding body-worn camera usage, the Sheriff introduced an official policy in 2014. Since the introduction of Wilkinson County's body-worn camera policy in July 2014, there has been a marked decline in reported crimes in the county. In 2013, the county reported 135 crimes on its FBI Universal Crime Report (UCR). In 2014, that number decreased to 123, a decrease of nearly 9 percent. Projecting the rate from the first four months forward for the rest of 2015, the county is on pace for only 105 reported crimes this year, a decrease of nearly 15 percent from 2014 and 22 percent from 2013-2015. Interestingly, despite this steady decrease in crimes reported, adult arrests have increased from year to year, from 277 in 2013, to 290 in 2014, to a projected 336 in 2015. The trend of increasing arrests highlights the importance of secure and transparent policies and procedures in the Wilkinson County jail. As arrests go up, greater opportunities exist for incidents between officers and inmates and among

inmates themselves. Body-worn cameras for officers in the county jail could help to mitigate this potential for conflict.

According to the 2010 Census, Wilkinson County has an estimated population of 9,563. According to the 2013 American Community Survey estimates, this population is approximately 59.9 percent white and 37.6 percent black or African American. According to the same estimates, the median household income for Wilkinson County is \$36,173, more than 26 percent lower than the Georgia median household income of \$49,179. Twenty-one percent of the Wilkinson County total population lives in poverty, with 36 percent of the population under 18 years old falling into this category. Throughout the United States, incidents involving violence between citizens and public safety officers often involve racially diverse populations in low-income communities. Wilkinson County certainly fits this description. Much of the research and media attention regarding body-worn cameras centers on the effect that this technology can have in racially diverse, low-to moderate-income urban communities. If funded, Wilkinson County, a rural community, could provide information to the federal government that could advance body-worn camera programs in entirely different types of communities, previously ignored by large-scale evaluations. Wilkinson County's small population and below-average household incomes lead to a small tax base, making it very difficult for the Sheriff's Office to purchase an adequate body-worn camera system without financial assistance.

Body-worn cameras utilized under a sound, thoughtful system of policies can be powerful tools that can help mitigate use-of-force complaints from both the general public and public safety officers. Body-worn cameras produce objective, unbiased evidence that can help determine the facts regarding questionable interactions between officers and community members. Not only do body-worn cameras provide an up-close, unbiased perspective, but they also have the potential to

act as a potential calming mechanism, providing positive pressure to both citizens and the officers interacting with them to behave courteously and professionally. For example, in Rialto, California, the Police Department saw an 88 percent decrease in citizen use-of-force complaints the year after implementing a body-worn camera program. In Mesa, Arizona, complaints decreased 75 percent in the wake of the introduction of body-worn cameras<sup>1</sup>. These results, while excellent, should not be seen as exceptions.

Wilkinson County, while a smaller community than these analogues, has seen similarly positive results from its body-worn camera program through a significant decrease in crimes reported. This grant could help to enhance these positive results and alleviate some of the deficiencies in the existing system, namely the lack of security in the chain of evidence and the quality of the video evidence produced. While there may be privacy concerns regarding the use of body-worn cameras, these concerns are outweighed by the cameras' propensity to enhance and promote the constitutional rights of citizens and the professional behavior of public safety personnel. It is now possible and becoming increasingly common for citizens to film interactions with police officers on their phones. While citizens absolutely have the right to film and share video involving interactions with public safety personnel, this video has little value towards discerning the true course of events in a questionable interaction as it can easily be manipulated and is not held to a secure chain of evidence. With sound policies and procedures in place, body-worn camera video evidence is not susceptible to these challenges.

Digital multimedia evidence (DME) is a powerful tool that helps judges, juries, investigators, and prosecutors, accurately, professionally, and ethically adjudicate criminal cases. If sound body-

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<sup>1</sup> Miller, Lindsay, Jessica Toliver, and Police Executive Research Forum. 2014. *Implementing a Body-Worn Camera Program: Recommendations and Lessons Learned*. Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services. [www.justice.gov/iso/opa/resources/472014912134715246869.pdf](http://www.justice.gov/iso/opa/resources/472014912134715246869.pdf).

worn camera policies are implemented properly, then DME will be readily available to investigators, prosecutors, judges, juries, and other interested parties. The primary concern of adjudication is seeking the truth. DME provides an innovative, honest perspective that helps decision makers to discern truth and achieve justice. In Wilkinson County, DME could be a powerful tool for prosecutors and the Sheriff's Office to work together towards justice. This grant could help make DME much more viable in Wilkinson County by providing the Sheriff's Office with the funds necessary to purchase a comprehensive camera system which ensures a secure chain of evidence, connecting the goals of law enforcement and prosecutors.

The Wilkinson County Sheriff's Department has secured the partnership and support of the Ocmulgee Judicial Circuit District Attorney's Office and the Assistant District Attorney for Wilkinson County in the implementation of the body-worn camera program. DME is a powerful tool for public safety investigators and government prosecutors alike. The District Attorney's Office would be thrilled with the purchase of new cameras which integrate a more secure data storage system, making evidence from body-worn cameras carry much greater weight in a court of law.

The cameras that the Sheriff's Office will purchase through this grant are part of a package which includes secure software. Data will be stored on a local PC, managed and operated exclusively by Sheriff's Office personnel. The Sheriff's Office already has the servers and data storage capabilities to properly store and secure data. The Wilkinson County staff is experienced in responding to Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests and understands the proper procedures and legal liabilities that surround FOIA.

According to the Wilkinson County Sheriff, there will be 22 sworn officers working for the Wilkinson County Sheriff's Office at the time of program implementation. In addition to these

officers, the Sheriff will provide body-worn cameras to the staff of the county jail. Equipping jail staff with body-worn cameras could provide new insight to the Bureau of Justice Assistance as to the effect of digital media evidence in a rural jail environment. All of the sworn officers, including the lead jail officer, have patrol activities and regular citizen interaction outside of the agency. All of the jail officers have regular interaction with inmates.

### **Project Design and Implementation**

Body-worn cameras are innovative tools that are becoming increasingly essential for the safety and due process of the general public and public safety personnel. Sheriff Richard Chatman and the Wilkinson County Sheriff's Office recognize that body-worn cameras are powerful and effective tools that help to ensure accountability, due process, and most importantly safety and they have been using these cameras for several years. Seeing the need and understanding the salience of issues regarding interactions between police officers and citizens across the country, Sheriff Chatman spearheaded the effort to create a body-worn camera policy for Wilkinson County in 2014. The primary objectives of the body-worn camera program, as articulated in Sheriff's Office Policy O-206 are:

- (1) "Body-worn cameras allow for accurate documentation of deputy-public contacts, arrests, and critical incidents. They also serve to enhance the accuracy of deputy reports and testimony in court.
- (2) Audio and video recordings also enhance this office's ability to review probable cause for arrest, deputy and suspect interaction, and evidence for investigative and prosecutorial purposes and to provide additional information for deputy evaluation and training.

(3) The body-worn camera may also be useful in documenting crime and accident scenes or other events that include the confiscation and documentation of evidence or contraband.”

The Sheriff’s Office’s current body-worn camera system does not enable it to meet these objectives, primarily due to concerns about the integrity of the chain of evidence. One of the most important aspects of operating a body-worn camera program is ensuring the integrity of video evidence generated by the cameras. The current, inadequate camera program in Wilkinson County relies heavily on the honesty and diligence of officers to properly handle and submit removal media from their respective body-worn cameras. While the Wilkinson County Sheriff believes in the honesty and integrity of his officers, it is essential to the due process rights of citizens for the Sheriff’s Office to ensure that all evidence is handled in an uncompromising manner at all times. Additionally, this secure chain of evidence makes body-worn camera generated evidence much more viable in prosecution. The Sheriff’s Office’s goal in applying for this grant is to give department personnel and prosecutors the tools they need to keep their practices in line with their policies, efficiently and fairly administer justice, and ensure accountability to the Constitution. Currently, Wilkinson County officers are responsible for ethically and consistently removing media from their respective cameras and uploading it to the Sheriff’s Office’s data storage system. While there have been no documented incidents of tampering and Sheriff Chatman believes in the integrity of his officers, the current, inadequate system provides significant opportunities for tampering, weakening the ability of prosecutors to utilize viable evidence in a court of law and potentially endangering the constitutional rights of residents of Wilkinson County.

While the Wilkinson County Sheriff’s Office already has body-worn camera policies in place, they plan to update and enhance their policies to better meet community needs with

assistance from this program. In the coming months, the Sheriff's Office intends to update policies to more directly address privacy and data storage concerns. Under the current policy, deputies are provided significant discretion in deciding when to record their activities and interactions with the public. In keeping with the recommendations of the Police Executive Research Forum, the Sheriff's Office intends to allow officers a degree of discretion, but also to create a policy which more comprehensively addresses situations where cameras should always be used.

A key component of officer discretion will be allowing officers to refrain from recording intelligence gathering conversations with community members in order to protect the privacy concerns of cooperating citizens and maintain existing community relationships. Officers will also be required to document incidents where they utilize discretion to not record interactions with the public in situations where it may otherwise be required. Additionally, the Sheriff's Office intends to create a new policy addressing data storage. Keeping in mind the 60-90 day retention period for non-evidentiary video advocated by the Police Executive Research Forum, the Sheriff's Office will collaborate with the Wilkinson County government to determine data storage policies in accordance with available data server storage.

Since Wilkinson County has already implemented an initial body-worn camera program, many of the hurdles typically experienced in program implementation may be avoidable in this case, particularly in regards to addressing officer concerns on the subject. Officers are already aware of the role cameras can play in de-escalating citizen interactions (and thus complaints) and the help that video footage can provide in adjudication. Officers will be allowed to review footage before making official statements or testifying in court. The Sheriff and the Chief Deputy review evidence as needed and randomly for training and evaluative purposes.

The Sheriff's Office has a Community Outreach Program in place which gives officers the opportunity to interact with and gain the trust of the residents of their community. The Community Outreach Program provides a forum for the Sheriff's Office to interact with residents of the county in a friendly, informative way. Through the Community Outreach Program, the Sheriff's Office has a strong presence in the Wilkinson County Schools. The Sheriff and his deputies regularly participate in events and assemblies at local schools, educating students, teachers, and parents on public safety issues. These efforts currently consist primarily of drug and alcohol education through the D.A.R.E and K-9 programs. Beginning in the 2015-2016 school year, the Sheriff's Office will integrate body-worn cameras into their Community Outreach Program. Officers will demonstrate to students how body-worn cameras work and explain the reasons for using them, focusing on the propensity of body-worn cameras to promote good behavior from citizens and officers and to protect the constitutional rights of all involved.

The Sheriff's Office has a long history of community engagement in Wilkinson County. This program would simply be the latest project in a long line of citizen engagement activities. The Sheriff's Office has been operating a Neighborhood Watch program for many years, collaborating with citizen leaders to keep residential neighborhoods safe from crime. In addition to their school system and neighborhood watch efforts, the Sheriff's Office also has a long history of participation and engagement at Vacation Bible Schools at Wilkinson County churches, leading demonstrations and engaging children and church members with information about public safety, building trust and relationships along the way. The body-worn camera program has the potential to significantly enhance these outreach efforts. While body-worn cameras have important functional purposes, they will also be very interesting and exciting to community members, particularly children, in demonstrations. The Sheriff's Office can easily integrate body-worn

cameras into their existing community outreach efforts at no added cost. From school assemblies, to D.A.R.E. presentations, to Vacation Bible Schools, body-worn cameras will be an essential component of the Sheriff's Office's outreach efforts, providing a forum for discussion on crucial issues by engaging community members with the intrigue of new, exciting technology. It is important to remember that while body-worn cameras are powerful tools in law enforcement, they are not flawless solutions. The Sheriff's Office will also utilize the Community Outreach program to manage expectations for the body-worn camera program, informing the public of the limitations of video evidence and of situations in which video evidence may not be available.

In addition to communicating with the general public, the Sheriff's Office will engage with the Ocmulgee Judicial Circuit Assistant District Attorney for Wilkinson County throughout the life of their body-worn camera program, informing prosecutors about the benefits and limitations of evidence generated by body-worn cameras. Usage of body-worn cameras in the county jail will provide additional transparency, accountability, and cohesion between the criminal justice organizations in Wilkinson County.

While this is not a research proposal, Wilkinson County's experiences with body-worn cameras could prove to be very valuable, particularly to similar governments in the Middle Georgia region. Wilkinson County is part of a collaborative network of 11 counties and 20 cities serviced by the Middle Georgia Regional Commission. The Middle Georgia Regional Commission will facilitate information sharing between the law enforcement agencies in the region, helping other agencies learn from Wilkinson County's policies and experiences, providing a hub for discussion, education, and collaboration. The Regional Commission has agreed to provide this service free of charge. This collaboration provides an opportunity for grant funds to ultimately result in cascading benefits to the wider Middle Georgia region, as funding in Wilkinson County illuminates best

practices and technologies for the other communities in the region to employ. Many evaluations of body-worn camera programs center on large, urban police departments. Funding the Wilkinson County Sheriff's Office would provide the Bureau of Justice Assistance a window into the inner-workings of a body-worn camera program in a rural, small town environment. The information produced by an intervention in Wilkinson County could help to inform federal efforts in rural areas throughout the country.

Due to limited available funds, securing outside funding is essential to the enhancement of Wilkinson County's body-worn camera program. The Sheriff's Office can afford to match up to \$10,000 towards this project. Since the Sheriff's Office has already implemented a body-worn camera program, many startup and auxiliary costs can be avoided. The Sheriff's Office will use grant funds and matching local funds exclusively towards the purchase of a comprehensive body-worn camera system and travel required of grant recipients.

The Sheriff's Office has extensively researched body-worn cameras and received detailed quotes from multiple providers, seeking to find the best cameras available that meet their financial limitations. The Sheriff's Office intends to purchase 25 Safety Vision Prima Facie cameras. These cameras meet all 18 of the Bureau of Justice Assistance's preferred technical criteria. Most importantly for Wilkinson County, the camera system comes with a secure software package for data storage and management. Data is uploaded to a secure, internal server, with minimal officer action, and no removable media, meeting the specifications outlined by the Bureau of Justice Assistance and allaying any concerns about the chain of custody for evidence. The cameras are also extremely cost-effective, providing high-quality video evidence at a comparatively low price.

The Sheriff's Office will utilize the objectives suggested in the grant solicitation as overarching goals for their body-worn camera project and will use data generated towards the achievement of these goals in program evaluations. These objectives are as follows:

1. Improve transparency and accountability in encounters between police and the public by deploying body-worn cameras and train law enforcement personnel on appropriate body-worn camera privacy policies and operational procedures.
2. Establish privacy policies and operational procedures governing body-worn cameras that are transparent, accessible to the public and address body-worn camera issues involving legal liabilities of FOIA, civil rights, domestic violence, juvenile groups, and victim's groups.
3. Implementation of a body-worn camera program developed in a planned and phased approach that first achieves broad stakeholder, local political leadership, community engagement and then leverages partnership input to address policy, training, deployment, and ultimately procurement related requirements.

The Sheriff's Office will meet goal #1 by providing all of its patrol and jail officers with timely, thorough, and relevant body-worn camera training. Sheriff Chatman will lead training and policy development, using the recommendations of COPS, PERF, and other leading organizations as the basis for best practices and procedures.

They will achieve goal #2 by creating transparent, digestible, meaningful policies through collaboration between the sheriff, deputies, jail officers, the assistant district attorney, community members engaged through the Community Outreach Program, and any local advocacy organizations that show an interest in being a part of policy development. Sheriff Chatman will

lead the policy development and enhancement process, keeping best practices in mind throughout the process.

Goal #3 is the ultimate goal of Wilkinson County's proposed body-worn camera program enhancement. The Sheriff's Office intends to achieve this goal by purchasing 25 new body-worn cameras, phasing out the usage of their current inadequate cameras, training officers in new policies and procedures for the new cameras, and gradually deploying the new cameras in conjunction with extensive community engagement, building policies and understanding along the way. (For more details, see attached timeline.)

### **Capabilities and Competencies**

The Wilkinson County Sheriff's Office has already demonstrated their ability to implement this sort of project by their success in implementing the existing body-camera program. Sheriff Chatman has served as a law enforcement officer in Wilkinson County since 1981. He is experienced and well trained and understands the major issues facing law enforcement today. He has extensive experience developing and writing policies for the Sheriff's Office. The Sheriff's Office staff has several years of experience managing digital records management software and the software package that the Sheriff's Office is seeking to fund is very user friendly. Wilkinson County has trained finance staff with extensive experience managing funds from a variety of sources, including previous BJA awards.

The Sheriff's Office will devote significant work hours and manpower towards the goal of enhancing and improving existing body-worn camera policies. In the coming months, Sheriff Chatman will meet with several experienced Wilkinson County deputies and the Assistant District Attorney for Wilkinson County to determine and implement best practices in body-worn camera

procedures. The Sheriff's Office will utilize its Community Outreach Program to articulate body-worn camera policies to the general public, providing information and demonstrations at the same time. The Sheriff's Office has utilized community outreach efforts in the past to implement Neighborhood Watch and D.A.R.E programs and they believe that body-worn cameras will be a natural fit for the Community Outreach Program as well.

The Wilkinson County Sheriff's Office has a long history of successful integration of new technology into their policies, procedures, and practices. The Sheriff's Office began using a digital records management system (RMS) in 2001 and began using mobile computer units in their patrol cars in 2007. Both the RMS and the mobile computer program implementations were highly successful. All of the sworn officers and office staff are trained and proficient in utilizing digital solutions to better perform their jobs.

### **Program Continuity**

Federal funds will be used exclusively for the purchase of new body-worn cameras. The Sheriff's Office will continue to allocate funds from its general fund allocations towards the maintenance and continuation of its body-worn camera program. The body-worn camera program will become a regular component of the Sheriff's Office's Community Outreach Program, helping to familiarize citizens with policies and practices and providing continuity in the community long after the expenditure of all granted funds.

## **Plan for Collecting the Data Required for this Solicitation's Performance Measures and Sustainment**

*Objective: Improve transparency and accountability in encounters between police and the public by deploying body-worn cameras and train law enforcement personnel on appropriate body-worn camera privacy policies and operational procedures.*

The performance measures for this objective will be the percent of eligible officers within the department wearing body-worn cameras and the percentage of law enforcement officers trained on the policies and procedures including usage, analysis, and management. Sheriff Chatman will be responsible for measuring the results of this objective. In order to meet this objective, Sheriff Chatman will lead all officers in mandatory body-worn camera training sessions.

*Objective: Establish privacy policies and operational procedures governing body-worn cameras that are transparent, accessible to the public and address body-worn camera issues involving legal liabilities of FOIA, civil rights, domestic violence, juvenile groups, and victim's groups.*

The performance measures for this objective will be the number of new policies developed that address the key body-worn camera policy and procedure areas (data management and retention, collaboration and coordination, recording discretion, documentation of failure to record, review of footage, etc.), the percent decrease in the number of public complaints, the percent decrease in substantiated citizen-officer complaints, and the percent decrease in the number of use-of-force complaints filed. Sheriff Chatman and his office staff will be responsible for measuring the results of this objective. For each of these performance measures, the Sheriff will collect and analyze data on a monthly basis with August 2015 serving as the baseline for comparison.

*Objective: Implementation of a body-worn camera program developed in a planned and phased approach that first achieves broad stakeholder, local political leadership, community engagement and then leverages partnership input to address policy, training, deployment, and ultimately procurement related requirements.*

The performance measures for this objective will be the number of external partners participating in the body-worn camera initiative, the number of external partners who commit their participation in the program formally through a Memorandum of Understanding, and the number of new staff positions (if any) created/classified as a result of the body-worn camera initiative. Sheriff Chatman will be responsible for measuring the results of this objective.