**[music]**

**Intro:** Welcome to the Let’s Talk Government Podcast. A podcast that is provided for you by the department of government at Minnesota State University, Mankato. Located in Minnesota in the United States. I am your host Dr. Pat Nelson, the chairperson of the department of criminal justice. I want to thank you for joining us as we explore different topics related to government. Some may be surprising and some may not, so please enjoy.

**Dr. Nelson:** Welcome to Episode 29 of the let's talk government podcast, body cameras and policing. I'm joined by Dr. Thor Dahle and Dr. John Reed from the law enforcement program and the Department of Criminal Justice at Minnesota State University Mankato. They are just starting a research project on body cameras so I thought it'd be great to have them in as guests so. So you know one of the first questions we always get after an officer involved shooting is why wasn't there a body camera? So what would be some reasons why all agencies and all officers are not wearing body cameras?

**Dr. Dahle:** Expense is one of one of them. More recent stats I saw was somewhere over two thirds of agencies have them now. But that still means there's a lot of places that don't and some I think it seems to be more common and larger agencies, but these are multimillion-dollar projects. And just talking with an official from one of our state agencies about implementing a project, it's millions of dollars, hundreds of hours of time. Not only just to equip them but you also have to train people on how to use them and use them properly. So, we get to the point where we've seen so many police videos on television from squad car cameras or body cameras we just assume everything is being recorded. But you throw that in with technology failures and other issues that happen, that the cameras are just not going to be there every time.

**Dr. Reed:** Yeah and I'll tell you another other thing that is quite expensive is the recurring calls to the storage for the video. And id talked to a couple police agencies about a year ago that were from larger cities and they were telling me that they had calculated, for a 10 hour shift in a busy division, they would probably use close to a gig of storage space and I think that's where most of these people are buying a hard time paying for that. And I think you see that some in their policies because not all of them require, not all the departments require people to have their camera on all the time it's just for certain things that are occurring.

**Dr. Dahle:** And high stress events you're asking us to remember to turn on a camera as they get out of a car. And then to know that it was on, then when they push the button it was good enough. Some technologies catching up there's now holsters where you remove your gun or taser and the camera comes out automatically. But if you don't have that it’s just one more reason that the video may not be there.

**Dr. Nelson:** You know and we think about small agencies. So you have agencies of two, three or four people that are, you’re a whole law enforcement agency and your whole city government has maybe two computers amongst them now asking him to take on this cost. And the technology could be very challenging, especially if there's not like an IT that can help them so.

**Dr. Dahle:** There are some small agencies that have gone back. They've made the purchase but just like John was suggesting, supporting them with all the technological requirements that are required after that have proven to be too expensive and some small agencies have just given up.

**Dr. Reed:** And I'll tell you, another thing also is like not only have they given up but even some of the more premier companies that make the tools have worked up deals to give the tool to police officers in a department, but charged for the storage that the department would have to sign a five year contract. So that tells you a little bit about it that there must be a lot of money and cloud storage for those things.

**Dr. Nelson:** Well that's true. And then we also have laws about how long you have to retain that data and Freedom of Information Acts. And it's not like you can just store a year, you have to store 5 to 7 to 10 years depending on what state you're in, which is a huge amount. That's how they catch you right? They give you the body camera for free, but you have to sign the contract that goes with it right?

**Dr. Dahle:** I was talking with a former coworker that was the chief of police and that agency has now just recently started using body cameras. But prior to going into that project he's-- they estimated they would need one full time person whose job was to do nothing other than manage the body camera footage. So, storing it, redacting it when requests are made, all of this, support services. And this is somebody that's got-- you’re not talking about a minimum wage job this is someone who's got technic technical training that's not cheap. So in addition of all the cloud storage and all the vendor payments, there was additional staff requirements just to do the more so the manual labor; lifting when it comes to operating a camera system.

**Dr. Nelson:** I know you both are starting a project here so you've started to do some research. But you know the initial premise behind body cameras is that it would monitor police behavior.  
 So what are you guys finding as you're starting to delve into this project? Is it actually doing that, is it a monitoring behavior? Is it giving supervisors the ability to monitor behavior?

**Dr. Dahle:** It depends on the agencies. Some of the early studies were really encouraging, there were in Mesa Arizona andway out in California. We saw an officer, a reduction officers use of force, reductions and complaints against officers. But subsequent research hasn't always supported that. There was a more recent study in Washington DC where they took 1000 officers, equipped them with body cameras and compared them with 1000 officers who did not have them, and they found no statistically significant difference in the use of force or complaints against the officers. Now when they looked into the agency more clear-- more closely, they had gone-- undergone a major, I don't know, policy renovation, practice renovation, training renovation, because of problems they've had before and they suggested that because of all of those changes that have been made officers that were given the cameras, just continued to operate as they always had and it didn't have that type of impact. That said, doesn't mean that they still can't be used as an accountability tool when something does go wrong, but that's where policy comes in. And if it's a toothless tiger and nobody checks on the policy and to make sure officers are doing what they're supposed to do, make sure that they know occasionally somebody's going to look at the video just randomly audited, then it's just another thing that they're wearing. That's not going to be something that they are concerned about changing their behavior, if that's even necessary.

**Dr. Reed:** John just has a very pensive look on his face so I was going to give him a moment-- how about if I set you up with, you know on the flip side of it, when we introduced squad cameras and body cameras we told the officers they would help exonerate you on complaints that were frivolous. So I'm going to point this towards John, do you think the body cameras are fulfilling that role as well as protecting the officers?

**Dr. Dahle:** I think probably not as much as we first believed it. I think it will cut out a lot of you know unnecessary complaints and so forth. As far as, I've heard of many situations where officers are actually cleared of wrongdoing due to having that body camera. But one of the issues I think is, as long as somebody is monitoring that you brought up a minute ago and that's actually what I was thinking about, you know some of these agencies I think it could be a tremendous training tool where you could have people monitoring those things and passing that information off to training. And there could be a lot of corrective action taken from what the old term, positive **[inaudible]**. So I think from that standpoint it's important to have people do the monitoring. But today, I was looking at a news story this morning, I don't know if you all saw it, from Indianapolis where they had excessive use of force incident. And this happened you know a while back and they're just finding out about it right now. So, it obviously I don't think people were watching it that much you know at that particular time so.

**Dr. Dahle:** I think sometimes the expectation from the public might be that there's somebody watching every minute of footage that every agency generates is just not practical. And so you're going to run into situations where you find what you just described, which is an old incident. You know even in my-- I recall when we implemented squad car cameras there was a lot of concern by officers about that kind of big brother idea that somebody's looking over my shoulder all the time. And one of the things they were told was this isn't going to be a gotcha tool where we're going to go looking for trouble. Well, once that technology was there then it was kind of realized this is foolish to not use the technology and start looking at code three driving or random incidents just to see how officers are behaving. And sure enough, incidents were discovered and discipline was applied or as you just described, used for training. And it took a while for officers to get used to that, that yes, occasionally it's going to hold you accountable. Yes, you might see yourself on a video in a training situation. But once people got used to that I think a lot of that fear was pushed to the side. But I think that's always the hard part with any kind of new technology. That perception, your perceptions about something you’re not familiar with or things you've just seen on television can be really concerning until you actually have the experience.

**Dr. Reed:** Yeah and I think the officers that really have a lot of issue with what Dr. Dahle‘s talking about, were in departments where this wasn't, it was implemented, but it wasn't communicated very well as far as policy and how the implementation was going to go and what the videos would be used for or could possibly be used for. And I think that runs and I've talked to a number of officers from different agencies that have said, hey you know nobody said they were going to review this you know they're just looking, they’d be an administration just looking to catch us doing something wrong. And I think a lot of that is communication where it didn't happen on the front end of the implementation.

**Dr. Nelson:** So what are some limitations you guys see about body cameras.  
   
Dr. Dahle: I was just about to say the perspective that it's just a perspective. I was actually just going over some body camera footage with one of my classes and the officers end up struggling with the person, the body camera-- it just becomes a jumbled blur because there's a physical struggle. You can hear some of what's going on, but even then it's muffled by the constant struggle and in the end, you could not honestly draw much of anything from it. It was on the verge of useless. Now, that said because videos everywhere, we were then able to look at different perspectives from security cameras and people that were videoing it with their cell phones and we got better perspectives in. But even with all of that, you still could not really see what was happening in the struggle. You could make guesses but you just couldn't see. And I think that's hard for people to understand is, it's there but it's not a little—its hovering over your head all the time. It’s not going to hear everything, it's not going to see everything.

**Dr. Reed:** And I think that a lot of that comes from TV or media. People watch it and they think that they're going to be watching a motion picture like you would go to the theater. And it's just as Thor said the bodies are moving around and those different things. Where I see that as being important though and had discussions with officers when we first implemented this in Louisville, was that you have all these other perspective like Thor said security, people with phones, and everybody's got a camera today. So I think one of the big things is, is we as administrators or the public can get a different perspective of exactly what the officers seeing. And I think that's very important because there's been some of these camera events that have been where the officer didn't have a camera but people had the camera. And the one in particular I'm thinking about a gentleman getting out of the car and the officer said he had a  
 gun but you couldn't see the gun on the video and then they finally got a couple of witnesses to come forward and said he did have a gun. And it was on the tail end of one of the citizens of the videos. So I think it's really good from that perspective.

**Dr. Nelson:** Well and that's something I think is a very unrealistic expectation from the public. That you should be able to see everything on video. When in reality if you've spent time looking at videos, it's very difficult to see things. And then the other thing is the limitation about where the body camera is worn right? Originally taser came out with like the camera on your glasses that was just like poking off the one side of your glasses. Well that only gave you like a half of a perspective. They’re worn in the middle of your body now, you don't always see what the person is seeing so. There are definitely physical limitations there. What about some policy limitations? I mean, there's always discussion about policy on how often the cameras should be on and how often-- or should the officers have the ability to turn it off or not.

**Dr. Reed:** Well, I think, there are a number of policy limitations with this. One as you mentioned, you kind of-- there's two schools of thought, actually for most of these departments. And some people will argue that, that video is evidence versus it should be a transparent tool that we can show the public and so forth. And that's argued a lot so you know chiefs really got to make up their mind which direction they want to go on that either hold as evidence or as I think you should go ahead and release it because it's going to end up getting released anyway or you'll be forced to release it. So from that perspective I think that's important. But I think also this issue is, is you're talking about with when to turn it on and when to turn it off. That's probably one of the biggest issues that I've seen out there you know and a lot of its driven by money, a lot of its driven by we don't want to video everything. So, you know that's really a call for a chief and to look at those recurring calls.

**Dr. Nelson:** Well Dr. Dahle has gotten called away in the middle of our podcast so Dr. Reed and I are just going to keep talking here. So what about the argument that officers have that they should be able to have some personal time? Like you know, everybody needs to go to the bathroom, you don't need to have video running while you're eating, that type of thing. What do you think about that chief?

**Dr. Reed:** Yeah I think obviously, I agree with that or you having some personal time. And you got to, it's like everything else and I know you've seen that Pat where we're either at one end of the spectrum or the other and we can never find a middle ground. And I think sure, for stuff like that you don't want to be following somebody into a restroom and those types of things. But we also look, and I know that ACLU was really concerned when these first came out, about the privacy of individuals. Like we turn a camera on, we go into their house, we video everything that's in there, heaven forbid, but if there's a dead body in there that's half naked. You know, do we release all of that or not. And so that kind of falls back to what Thor was saying about having all that information and having the staff to redact a lot of the things that are private and those types of things. But, yeah typically you've got to find a middle of the road with any of these policies.

**Dr. Nelson:** That's true because we do also have victim confidentiality, we have juveniles that will show up on the videos. And one of the issues is that most of the states do not have clear laws on how to handle law enforcement video. We have laws about releasing information on reports, but video there's no clear statutes to guide agencies so they're all left to make their own individual policies.

**Dr. Reed:** Right and I think that privacy issue comes up all the time about issues of that nature. And like I said, ACLU’s been kind of looking at that very hard so we'll just have to see how it goes. But that's one thing you know I do a lot with International Association of Chiefs of Police and we try to come up with model policies that are the best. But there's a lot of difference as you all know between an agency, which the majority are of probably under 10 or 15 people in the United States versus an agency of 6000 or 3000 or you know even 1000 people. So from funding and all those particular things but I think a lot of folks are coming around to it. I think there are still some holdouts on these cameras.

**Dr. Nelson:** Right. Well when it comes to issues of transparency and building community trust, camera-- body cameras seems to be like one of the top two or three things that everybody mentioned so that if there is something that happens, we've got some footage of it. Do you think there's any way that body cameras would be a negative in transparency and building trust with the community?

**Dr. Reed:** Well, I can see if the wrong information gets out but it's what people get accustomed to. It's really like you're talking about this uniformity with rules. If we had uniformity on the police across the nation that everybody gave it out you know that's going to be dang near impossible to ever do. But if you could make something like that happen, because that’s another reason all these folks kind of give into this thought of what their perception of what the video looks like, is we have body worn cameras longer and longer you know they'll get better and better. You know, people will tend to you know accept that. But it's almost like when I came on you could go to court and just testify about an undercover guy. And then it got to the point where they wanted audio and then after video came out then they wanted video and audio. And of course the videos gotten way better. And then now with body cameras the wanting it on, everything you know. So, I think when people get a little more used to it, it won't be the issue. But one of the other bad things is, or one of them that I can think of, is that when we show those tapes to people or those videos to people we will tell them; look this has been redacted, this has been blocked out. And then you get into that issue that we didn't give them the original full video, that we manipulated it in some fashion and not everything is there. So you always have people that are going to argue that also.

**Dr. Nelson:** Yeah and we've actually seen that in court cases where they’ll release an agency or release a video to be viewed in court and then the court comes back and asks for the entire raw footage to determine that nothing was altered or excluded. I mean, and I agree in the court, they can do that because you can protect who views it, but to just release raw footage out to the public, even if they filed a Freedom of Information Act, would be irresponsible. Because then the agency's liable for any victim or juvenile or somebody else's whose privacy has been compromised.

**Dr. Reed:** Right and one of the other things that we hear from a lot of officers is when it comes to for those that are like detectives you know you have to make a decision are detectives going to wear **[inaudible]**? And then you get into the issue of them talking and getting information from victim’s slash witnesses slash informants. And everybody will know who my informant is or everybody will know the bad guy, will know who the-- what the witness said and retaliate against them. So you have all those arguments too.

**Dr. Nelson:** You know, I had never even considered about detectives and undercover work but it may get to the point where it's expected that they wear the cameras. I mean look at the shooting that happened in Minneapolis with the U.S. Marshals and the task force and the uproar over that having body camera footage there. But it' gets to be, where is the line right? Where's the line on having body cameras and their usefulness versus over videoing everything.

**Dr. Reed:** Yeah and if you want to kind of be analogous about it you can think of the days when vests first came out and you had body warm, or not body warm, but bullet resistant vests and then administrators were, you know the chief was saying what administrators are going to have to wear these too and you're thinking; well I never go outside I'm sitting behind a desk. And that argument if you recall, and you hear the same on this, well we're investigators we don't go out and that happened but you know as well as I do that any detective can get into anything just like any police officer so.

**Dr. Nelson:** Absolutely yeah absolutely. All right, well we're going to kind of wrap it up. Like I said Dr. Dahle is in the middle of a fire alarm something going on there so we'll wrap it up together. So how about some closing thoughts, why do you think there are getting to be mixed results on research and where do you think the trend is going to be in the future with body cameras?

**Dr. Reed:** Well I think that some of the stuff that I've read and others knows statistical significance to that, but just from talking to people there seems to be a different attitude in different parts of the country where it is. Agencies that have had a lot of issues, tend to like those agencies who’ve never had an issue, tend to say; hey, we don't have any issues we don't, we don't need it. And it's only a matter of time. It's kind of like when, not if, something's going to happen where you're going to need it and you mentioned that at the front end of the podcast where people ask why didn't they have a body camera on? I think the public expects it more and more. I think it's going to be especially hard to argue now because I think there's some moneys that are going to be coming available for purchasing those things and people were just going to have to look at it like hey, this storage cost is recurring but it's something that we're going to have to budget for and we're going to have to do it.

**Dr. Nelson:** Well I agree. I think that it's going to have to be some very serious discussions within agencies and their entities cities, counties and states on the importance of having the ability to pay for the storage and where they have to make the decision between paying for the storage and other things. So it's going to be interesting to watch in the future here.

**Dr. Reed:** Right. And that's one of the things that Thor and I wanted to basically do is not so much look at a lot of the larger agencies like have already been studied but we want to take a look at smaller and mid-sized to see if there's any difference between what is found from the large agencies in comparison. So that's really the focus of the work that we're getting ready to do.

**Dr. Nelson:** Well I think it's going to be really interesting because I mean when you look at the storage cost is equal to paying one officer for a year and having to make that decision but I think you'll get some good results so. Well thank you for joining me I always love our conversations and we’ll have to give Thor a hard time for bailing on us halfway through even though it was outside of his control so. Thank you Dr. Reed we’ll talk to you later.

**[music]**

Thank you for listening to this episode of Let’s Talk Government, if you have suggestions for future episode topics or other areas you'd like us to cover, please visit our website at link. mnsu.edu/let'stalkgov to submit your ideas. Join us every Tuesday for a new episode and thank you for listening.