

**Lake Section Officers' Perception of Body-Worn Cameras in  
Policing Before Implementation: Full Report**



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### **Acknowledgement**

This research was supported by the Rochester Police Department (RPD). We give special thanks to research coordinator Lieutenant Michael Perkowski from RPD who provided insight and expertise that greatly assisted the research. We thank Rochester Institute of Technology students Avanelle St. Bernard and Christina Burnett for dedicating their time in conducting the ride-along sessions. We would also like to show our gratitude to the patrol officers and sergeants who were involved in the ride-along sessions for sharing their thoughts with us.

**Abstract**

This study evaluates the impact of body-worn cameras (BWC) on police work, police-citizen encounters, and internal administrative procedures of the Rochester Police Department. In order to understand and measure the impact of BWC, researchers use a series of quantitative data including, but not limited to, crime occurrence, complaints against police, and criminal justice processes (criminal and internal investigations) before and after the camera deployment. This ride-along report is designed as a qualitative study for researchers to understand the nature of contemporary police patrol work. The purpose of the ride-along study is to collect qualitative data on officers' attitudes and expectations of how the body-worn cameras' will affect their work. After analyzing the result of each ride-along interview, researchers extracted several major aspects that were essential in understanding officers' current thoughts related to policing and the BWC. By comparing the pre-study results from different sections, researchers also hope to find out whether or not officers' attitudes were different between the sections of RPD.

Key words: *body-worn camera, ride-along, policing, perception*

## **Research Purpose**

Expectations for body-worn cameras (BWC) are extremely high in the public's opinion (Mitchell, 2017), as well as that of policy makers and police administrators (21<sup>st</sup> Century Policing Task Force, 2015). The complexity of police work, in terms of the exercise of discretion, the engagement of the public in sensitive encounters, and the management of day-to-day operations is likely to yield unanticipated changes in workflow, amendments to policy (e.g., LAPD video release policy: <http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-lapd-video-policy-20170131-story.html>), and perhaps even changes in patrol officers' and citizens' behaviors (Ariel and colleagues, 2016). It is imperative to have a baseline understanding of workflow, decision-processes, and routines to understand where, why, and how changes occurred subsequent to BWC implementation. This motivates the current research report which details patrol work and the current nature of police-citizen contact within the Goodman and Genesee sections. First, the methodology is introduced, outlining the sample of shifts and interview protocol. Next information gleaned from ride-along sessions via debriefings at encounters with citizens and a semi-structured interview of officers is distilled to establish a sketch of current patrol practice and to probe expectations for change that might be expected to accompany the implementation of BWC.

## **Methodology**

### **Sample Selection**

The Operation Bureau of RPD consists of five patrol sections: Lake, Genesee, Goodman, Clinton, and Central. Each section is divided into different car beats (See Appendix A for additional information detailing car beats in subsequently mentioned patrol sections). Within Lake, Genesee, Goodman, and Clinton Sections there are three platoons (1<sup>st</sup> Platoon: 23:00-7:00; 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon: 7:00- 15:00; 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon: 15:00-23:00); for Central Section there are five platoons (1<sup>st</sup> Platoon: 23:00-7:00; 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon: 7:00- 15:00; 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon: 15:00-23:00; 4<sup>th</sup> Platoon: 19:00-3:00; 5<sup>th</sup> Platoon: 11:00-19:00). Central Section's staffing is different from the other sections due to its unique combination of foot posts and walking beats in the downtown business district between its 5th platoon and detail personnel (See Appendix B for the staffing detail of each platoon).

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There are nine police beats in Lake Section: 201, 211, 221, 231, 241, 251, 261, 271, 281, and 291 (See Appendix A). For the ride-along sessions with patrol officers, researchers first randomly assorted platoons and patrol beats, then randomly assigned the assortments to four researchers. Each ride-along entailed four hours of observation and questions by researchers. Thus, each eight-hour Platoon was divided into two four-hour periods for each researcher to choose. For example: Researcher A was randomly assigned to the assortment of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon of Beat 201, since 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon includes the whole eight hours from 7:00 to 15:00, the researcher could choose to do the ride along either from 7:00 to 11:00 or from 11:00 to 15:00 on a week-day based on his/her schedule. A CPSI Research Assistant contacted the RPD BWC research coordinator in advance to schedule the ride-along sessions. Overall, it took researchers approximately five weeks to finish all ten ride-along sessions in Lake Section.

Of the ten officers selected for ride along sessions in Lake Section, six were female and four were male. For Lake Section, the ten officers assigned for the ride-along interviews had experience ranging between one and fourteen years of experience. It should be acknowledged here that although researchers randomly assigned ride-along platoons, the officers were directly assigned by their supervisors.

Researchers used a previously developed interview protocol as a guideline during ride-along sessions (See Appendix C for General Interview Questions for BWC Ride-along Research). During the interviews, researchers engaged in conversation with patrol officers, and, depending on the circumstances, new questions were improvised. For example, after a call-for-service, researchers are expected to ask officers questions like: "Could anything have been changed if you had a body-worn camera?" The purpose of this type of question is to help officers relate specific calls-for-service to the BWC. This semi-structured interview format allowed researchers to explore beyond the framework of prepared questions and expand the scope of research topics as appropriate. Before each ride-along session, researchers explained to officers the purpose of the ride-along and provided an oral statement of confidentiality.

## **Officers' Perception of Policing and Police Work in Lake Section**

In the first section of the ride along interview, researchers asked officers about the structure of policing and the nature of police work in their respective section. Subsequent interview questions inquired as to if officers believed the body-worn camera could affect the nature of police work as well as officers' expectations of the BWC. Additionally, researchers observed officers' interactions with citizens during calls-for-service. Therefore, additional questions were included based on specific situations without changing the overall structure of the interview framework in order to provide additional context. Officers provided their experience with calls for service and nature of the crimes in the section.

### **Lake Section Ride-Along Findings**

#### **Officers' Experience Patrolling Lake Section**

Lake Section, located at the north-western side of Rochester, is a district that combines residential, industrial and commercial areas. The officers interviewed for the ride-along sessions frequently mentioned domestic violence, drug usage and sales, prostitution, gangs, and gang-related firearm activity as the primary crime concerns for their patrol area. One officer recounted his experience with the criminal activity of Lake Section as "an area of vice, [in Lake Section] there are more serious crimes in comparison to the traffic violations officers [from other sections] are used to." Amongst all officers participating in the ride along sessions, there was a general consensus that the severity and frequency of calls for service varied by location, with some tending to have higher concentration of crimes than others.

#### **Officer's Perceptions of Current Police-Community Relationships**

When officers were asked about the prevailing trend of police-community relationships, the responses elicited were mixed. The observed officers were evenly split between those believing the community had positive attitudes versus negative attitudes on policing. One officer mentioned that these differences in the state of community relationships vary by locality, he stated: "the [type of] crime is the same, it's just different people," when comparing the east end of Lake Section to the west end.

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Officers who were optimistic of current police-community interactions stated that the citizens have generally been cooperative. An officer reinforced this belief by stating that “the people in Lake Section are great, do the right thing, and care about the community.” Another officer stated that “most of them (citizens in Lake Section) just want our help. In my beat, a lot of people are police friendly. In another area I patrolled, the people are not as friendly as here.”

Officers who perceived the current state of police-community interactions as poor frequently mentioned that many of the clientele in Lake Section don’t trust the police. One officer elaborated that “[citizen cooperation] is not good. We rarely get a legit victim who really wants help. Once I arrived at a scene where two black females were fighting, one of them started yelling ‘they sent us a white officer like that is going to help?’” Many officers cited social media as a contributing factor to poor police-community relations by showing controversial videos of police use of force. An officer mentioned that “the media is really bad [for police-community relationships] because of what people are seeing on the internet ... they are consulting the media to come to their conclusions.”

### **Officer Perceptions of Changes Related to BWC**

The largest component of the ride-along sessions investigated how officers perceived BWC being added as a policing tool during daily patrols. Researchers asked a variety of questions regarding how the BWC could potentially affect facets of their patrol. We asked officers their opinions on how BWC could affect different types of encounters or calls, officer and citizen behavior, community cooperation and trust, and officer workload. For further information on interview protocol, reference Appendix C. The sections in this paper below are subdivided into the perceived positive and negative impacts of the BWC on the officer’s patrol.

### **Officers’ Perceptions of BWC Benefits**

Most of the officers interviewed stated that they were comfortable with the implementation of the BWC into their daily patrol activities. Regardless of BWC utilization, officers stated that they would do their job identically and to the same high standards. Officers did, however, acknowledge the potential benefits of BWC implementation related to

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transparency, behavior modification, and the evidentiary value of the BWC in court. Subsequent sections detail with specificity the benefits of the BWC recognized by officers.

### □ **Transparency**

The most frequently mentioned benefit of BWC during the interviews was its ability to show the officers' perspective on their daily patrol. One officer mentioned that impaired police-community relationships that have resulted from negative nationwide media exposure could potentially be repaired with BWC footage. A few other officers believed that many of the videos circulating social media were biased in that they do not show the events leading up to the incidents, in which case, BWC could potentially provide justification for officers' actions. An officer stated that "we (the police) want to connect with the people ... and that the BWC will show 'what is really going on.'"

In connection to the beneficial impact of BWC footage on transparency, many officers believed that the BWC could resolve numerous complaints, particularly use of force complaints. The belief that the BWC could potentially exonerate officers of falsely filed complaints was due to the fact that the BWC can capture incidents "before, during, and after" they have occurred. As the BWC is able to show the events occurring prior to use of force, the footage could potentially justify such cases.

### □ **Behavior Modification Resulting from BWC**

One officer mentioned that the BWC can be used to modify the behavior of officers who are problematic. An officer elaborated on this subject and stated that "[The BWC] will change the actions of hot headed officers and their actions towards people. It will also capture officers' 'laziness' and attend to obvious things happening in the streets that they aren't assigned to." Additionally, some officers felt that the camera could potentially change the behavior of the clientele they interact with on their daily patrol. As a result of citizen acknowledgement of being recorded, some officers believe that their clientele will conduct themselves in more appropriate ways. For example, a citizen treating an officer disrespectfully may not do so if the citizen is aware that they are being recorded.

### □ **Evidentiary Usage of BWC**



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Officers often mentioned the benefit of utilizing BWC footage as evidence. One officer mentioned that during trials without video footage, juries often rely on the written reports describing the incident. BWC footage may be advantageous over written reports in these situations as they show the event from the officer's perception. Furthermore, another officer stated that BWC footage could potentially be helpful in reducing the amount of time spent on testimony during trials. In the trial the officer participated in, a large amount of time was spent characterizing the scene and detailing the incident. The amount of time spent recounting the elements of the case could have been shortened by referencing the BWC footage.

### **Officer's Concerns of BWC Implementation**

While the officers attending the ride along sessions perceived many benefits of implementing the BWC into their daily patrol, the same officers also recognized its limitations and expressed concerns with BWC implementation. The concerns that officers held over utilizing the BWC in their daily patrol can be subdivided into the follow themes: more limited discretion, reduced intelligence from witnesses or people with knowledge, increased workload, the possibility of BWC malfunction, as well as the BWC's placement on officers.

#### **□ BWC Limiting Officer Discretion**

Nearly all officers mentioned the potential impact of BWC implementation in limiting the discretion of officers, particularly in domestic incidents. Domestic incidents are usually resolved through means other than arrest, and are reconciled on scene. Officers stated that domestic incidents tend to be heated situations, in which people use figures of speech that may be considered criminal, but are usually not considered to be serious threats unless warranted. Officers stated that their discretion, which allows them to discern whether remarks made during domestic incidents are serious, may be eliminated with the implementation of BWC. As one officer stated, "sometimes you get to some domestics and they call out of anger and spite but don't want much done really. They say things they shouldn't say around us and we let it go. However, now that it is on camera and they are being documented ... we will have to go full out and make an arrest."

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### □ **Reduced Intelligence**

As a result of officers' reduced discretion potentially leading to more arrests; officers stated that individuals may be hesitant to talk to police officers wearing the BWC. Officers stated that witnesses were already hesitant to disclose information to the police, often due to a fear of retaliation, and implementing the BWC will only increase this hesitation. This constraint on communication goes beyond speaking to witnesses; one officer stated that the "BWC might deter people from talking to the police, even joking around, due to being recorded." Another officer stated that the BWC has the potential to divide citizens and the police: "...the community won't come together with police because of refusing to speak to police. Call volume could possibly be reduced, because they don't want to be involved, videotaped, or seen."

### □ **BWC Workload Concerns**

Most officers cited concerns over BWC-related processes creating an increase in their workloads. One stated that taking additional time to figure out BWC operation could potentially increase the time to respond to calls. The procedures involved with BWC processes considered troublesome were: docking the BWC, BWC activation before responding to a call for service, and BWC video uploading and downloading.

The requirement of activating the camera before attending calls for service was repeatedly cited by the officers as being likely to be an additional source of pressure in officers' daily workloads. This added stress pertains to the potential punitive consequences of forgetting to turn on the camera before attending a call for service. An officer elaborated by stating "what will happen if you forget [to turn on the camera]? If you were to forget the added step [in their workload] of having a camera, what will be the consequence? For example, if you are going to a call and it's an active call and forget to push a button what happens?"

Another concern for the BWC increasing officers' workloads was the possible need for additional report writing. In connection to the limited discretion resulting from BWC usage, officers stated that incidents that would have otherwise been resolved on scene, would lead to more arrests, and subsequently more reports to write.

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### □ **BWC Malfunctioning**

Officers expressing concerns over technical and operational issues with BWC based their opinions on what officers in other sections had experienced with BWC. The issues expressed by officers pertained to battery life, BWC attachment, BWC failure, and “beeping” issues.

Officers stated that they had heard from officers from other sections that the BWC had a short battery life, resulting in the BWC dying during an incident, and had attachment issues where the BWC could potentially fall off as a result of physical activity during incidents. Due to these issues, officers were worried about the potential conclusions the public might generate in instances of BWC malfunction. One officer stated that “some individuals will think officers turned [the BWC] off to be deliberate.”

A few officers expressed concerns over a feature included in the BWC where it exhibits a beeping noise while being operated. Officers who stated concerns over BWC beeping felt that it could be potentially place officers at risk during incidents. One officer stated that the “beeping will generally not be a problem, but maybe will during a risky search where it could be dangerous.”

### □ **BWC Placement**

A few officers stated concerns over the positioning of the BWC, which is located directly in the middle of the chest on an officer’s uniform. Since this positioning is lower than the officer’s line of sight, officers felt that the BWC may not be able to capture the entirety of an individual’s body language, or emotions exhibited. This could be potentially problematic as capturing an individual’s demeanor can make a large difference in terms of determining whether or not an arrest was justified.

An officer mentioned that the BWC’s placement on the chest may also be problematic in the case of a physical altercation. In instances where police may need to exert force in order to subdue an individual, the camera could easily be grabbed or knocked off. The officer believed that BWC placement over the shoulder would be more appropriate in these situations, and would capture footage closer to eye level.

## Summary

RPD officers from Lake Section acknowledged a myriad of potential benefits of BWC implementation. These benefits included: increased transparency, behavioral modification from officers and citizens, and evidentiary usages in court procedures. However, officers also expressed some concerns with BWC implementation. These concerns included: limited discretion as a result of the BWC, weakened communication between police and the public, increased workload, the tendency for the BWC to malfunction, and ineffective BWC placement. Often, it was stated by officers that the benefits associated with BWC usage were also closely associated with the previously stated concerns.

None of the officers fully endorsed the BWC without concerns. For example, officers who stated the potential evidentiary benefits the footage provides in court cases or in response to complaints later mentioned that the placement of the camera was a limiting factor in these scenarios. Furthermore, officers who stated that the BWC could serve as a potential behavioral conditioner also stated that interactions with police could decrease. These interactions could decrease as a result of privacy concerns around being recorded, or as a result of increased instances of arrest due to limited discretion. However, even though concerns about BWC implementation were present, officers stated that once they have received the BWC, they anticipate conduct their patrols in the same manner as they had prior to BWC implementation.

Generally, it appears that younger officers viewed BWC usage more positively, but any differences in BWC perceptions by age appeared to be subtle. In Lake Section, researchers made an effort to request ride-along interviews with more female officers, as officers in ride along interviews in previous sections were predominately male. However, even upon inclusion of more female officers in these interviews, there was no detectable difference in the perceptions of BWC usage by gender.

The experiences of officers with the BWC in other sections was a notable factor in shaping the responses of the interviews in Lake Section. For example, the concerns regarding the short battery life of the BWC, and issues with BWC detachment were based upon the accounts of officers from other sections where the BWC had already been implemented. Therefore, it should

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be acknowledged that a potential bias may exist in the interview responses compared with those of Clinton Section.

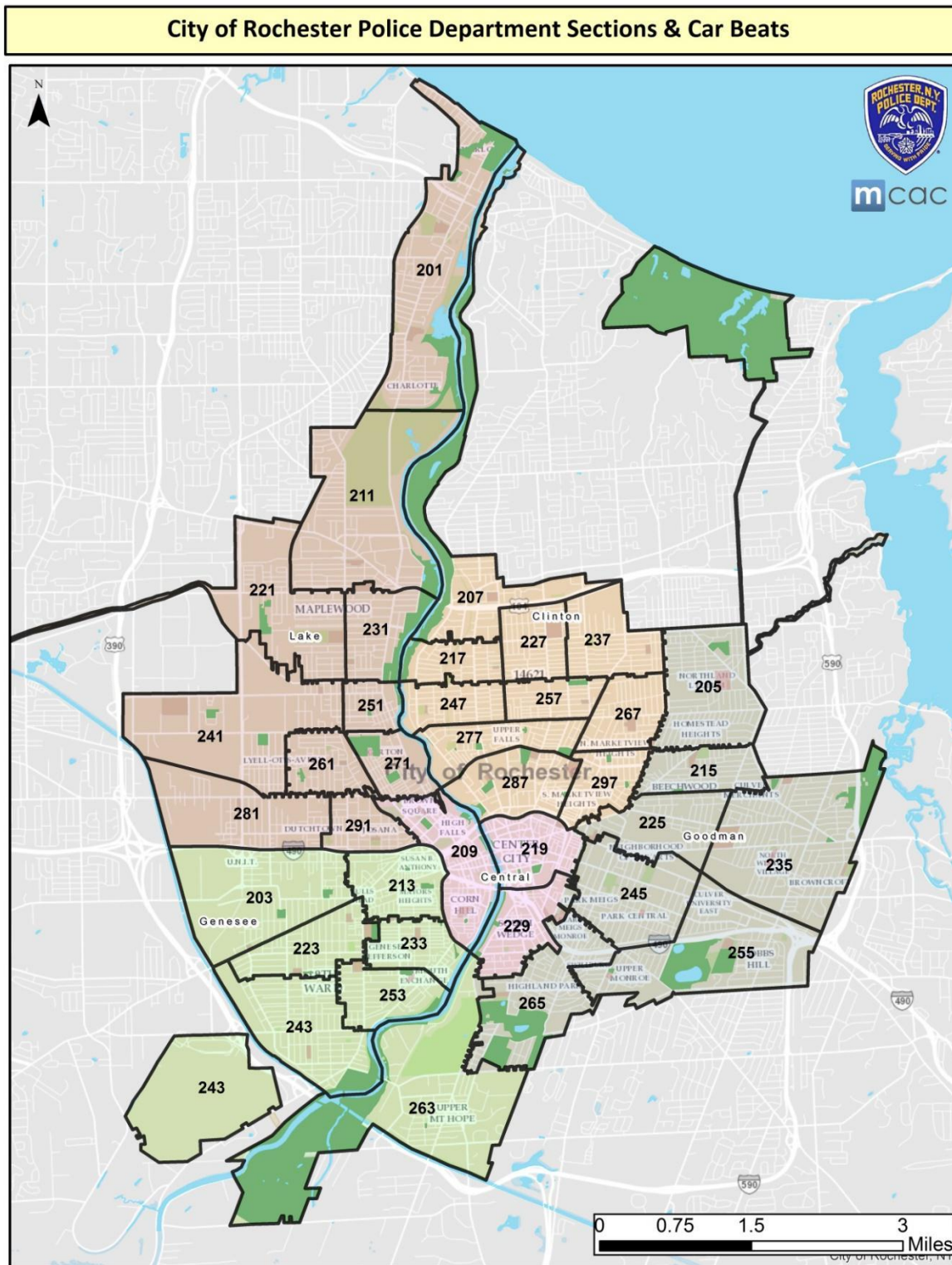
Although the officers in Goodman and Genesee Section believed the BWC would provide only minor benefits, research conducted on the impact of BWCs has been proven to be much more substantial. Recent research on BWCs has shown that they have great potential to decrease citizen complaints and police use of force (Ariel et al., 2015) and increase perceived police legitimacy, leading to more crime reporting (Ariel, 2016). These two changes may be indicative of behavioral transformations in both police and citizens. Capturing officers' internal acceptance and presumed impact of the BWC is important as police ultimately play a role in its effectiveness (Gaub et al., 2016). Research capturing these perceptions prior to and after BWC deployment show that the internal acceptance of BWCs can be enhanced as it becomes a more universally accepted technology (Gaub et al, 2016). Future ride-along sessions will provide additional insight into the relationship of Rochester's BWC initiative as it relates to post implementation perceptions of officers and the impact on work processes.

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Appendix A:



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Appendix B:

Rochester Police Department Patrol Staffing

Section	Platoon	Officers			5x2*	Total	Sergeants	Lieutenants	Investigators
		4x2 Work Week*							
		Wheel A	Wheel B	Wheel C					
Lake	1st	7	7	7		21	3	1	0
	2nd	8	8	8		24	4	1	2
	3rd	10	10	10		30	5	1	3
	4th				10	10	1	0	2
	Total	25	25	25	10	85	13	3	7
Genesee	1st	5	5	5		15	2	1	0
	2nd	7	7	7		21	4	1	2
	3rd	8	8	8		24	4	1	3
	4th				8	8	1	0	2
	Total	20	20	20	8	68	11	3	7
Goodman	1st	5	5	5		15	2	1	0
	2nd	7	7	7		21	4	1	2
	3rd	8	8	8		24	4	1	3
	4th				8	8	1	0	2
	Total	20	20	20	8	68	11	3	7
Clinton	1st	7	7	7		21	3	1	0
	2nd	8	8	8		24	4	1	2
	3rd	10	10	10		30	5	1	3
	4th				10	10	1	0	2
	Total	25	25	25	10	85	13	3	7
Central	1st	3	3	3		9	1	1	0
	2nd	3	3	3		9	2	1	1
	3rd	3	3	3		9	1	1	1
	4th				4	4	1	0	1
	5th				10	10	1	0	0
	Detail**				10	10	0	0	0
	Total	9	9	9	24	51	6	3	3
<b>Patrol Total</b>		<b>99</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>357</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>31</b>

<b>Platoon</b>	<b>Hours</b>								
1st	23:00-07:00								
2nd	07:00-15:00								
3rd	15:00-23:00								
4th	19:00-03:00								
5th	11:00-19:00								
* Patrol personnel work either a 4 days on 2 days off rotating schedule or a fixed 5 days on 2 days off schedule.									
** Central sections staffs a unique combination of foot posts and walking beats in the downtown business district between its 5th platoon and detail personnel.									
Times may vary slightly by Section									



Appendix C:

A Framework of Interview for Ride-along

1. What does a typical work day look like?
  - a. How long have you been a police officer?
  - b. How long have you been patrolling this area?
  - c. How long have you been working on this shift?
  - d. What's your patrol area?
  - e. What are the major crime concerns of this area based on your experience working here?
  - f. What time of your shift and what days of the week do you tend to have a larger workload (Calls for service etc.)?
  - g. How often do you have to call your supervisor? (Use of force report, major crime scene or other issues)
  - h. Overall, what do you think the police-citizen interactions are like right now? Are citizens cooperative? How much trust do you think you receive from the community you are patrolling (not trusted vs. trusted)?
  - i. What are the types of crimes in this area that need citizen input the most?
  - j. How often do you have to use force to solve a problem?
  - k. How comfortable are you with the idea of using BWC in policing? (Based on your personal experience and the national trend)
  - l. What issues do you want the BWC study to address?
  - m. Was there any situation where you thought having a BWC could have helped?
2. In what ways do you think the BWC is going to affect the nature of police work and why?
  - a. Do you think there would be a detectable change in policing with the addition of BWC? (Example: Police-citizen encounter,
    - (1) What are the common crimes in this patrol section? In what ways do you think BWC will change your job in this particular patrol area?
      - Do you think BWC will change the likelihood of proactive encounters?
      - Do you think BWC will change the response to reactive encounters?
      - Do you think BWC will bring more reliance on supervisor consultation?
    - (2) Possible changes in different kinds of encounters/calls?
      - Mentally ill
      - Family disturbance/domestic dispute
      - Any early investigative activities
      - Dealing with juveniles
      - Drug dealing
      - Gang
    - (3) How's BWC going to change citizen's view of/cooperation with police work?
      - Do you think BWC will help increase the public's trust of the police? (Justify certain cases?)
      - Do you think that the BWC will affect the quality of police-citizen encounters?
      - Do you think that citizens might question how the camera and its footage is used? Why?

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- How do you think the appearance of the BWC will affect the quality/quantity of informational communication between police and concerned citizens?
  - How will the BWC affect police interaction with witnesses?
  - How will the BWC affect evidentiary usage?
  - How will the BWC affect the possibility of follow-up investigative interviews?
- (4) In what ways do you think the BWC will affect domestic violence cases? (Victim cooperation, criminal charge, etc.)
3. Police perception of the BWC (Positive, Neutral or Negative)
- (1) Do you think the BWC is going to be an extra burden or do you tend to perceive it as an improvement that will make your job easier? Why do you think so?
- If Concern > Benefit:
- What's your major concern with using/implementing the BWC? (Technology? Workload? Discretion? Policy? Etc.). Can you give an example of how BWC could cause a problem in your work?
- If Benefit > Concern:
- What is your expected benefit of using/implementing the BWC? (Technology? Workload? Discretion? Policy? Etc.). Can you give an example of how the BWC could solve a problem in your work?
- (2) How comfortable are you with the BWC as a new policing technology?
- (3) Would the amount of time you will have to spend on BWC related work affect your role as an officer?
- (4) Are there locations/situations/encounters where you believe the camera may present issues, regardless of policy? (e.g., in homes, schools, with minors, in extreme weathers, particular kinds of events/witnesses)
- (5) What is your thought on BWC footage vs. officer vision/reaction?