

**MML/MACo Statement on JPR 8 – Public Information Act – Police Body-worn Camera Recordings
(Maryland Police Accountability Act of 2021)**

Contacts:

*Bill Jorch, Manager, Governmental Relations & Research, MML, 410-295-9100, billj@mdmunicipal.org
Natasha Mehu, Legislative Director, MACo, 410-269-0043, nmehu@mdcounties.org*

The Maryland Municipal League (MML) and Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) understand the need for reform within the realm of law enforcement in the state. Due to the timing of the hearings and release of the proposed slate of bills, our legislative committees were not able to officially review and take positions on them. Therefore, this letter is for informational purposes and shares the organizations' long-standing joint views on the issue of police body-worn cameras.

Both organizations have been involved with the issue of police body-worn cameras for many years. Although this is only one facet of the overall picture of public safety, it is an important one to local governments in Maryland. We look forward to participating in the debate as it moves forward.

If properly implemented, police body-worn cameras can help provide transparency and accountability for officer actions and protect both citizens and the officer. Best practices and policies established locally and in state law require officers and custodians to follow proper procedures and requirements for data storage and retention as well as for review, redaction, and release of the footage. However, body-worn cameras still pose significant implementation issues.

While several counties and municipalities have launched body-worn camera programs, the costs associated with the programs—which can reach into the tens of millions of dollars for multiyear comprehensive contracts—can be prohibitive to other jurisdictions. The proper storage and staff resources for necessary redactions of the audio and video footage from the cameras can be particularly cost burdensome.

Notably, the Maryland Public Information Act was largely created to handle paper documents and only recently updated to better handle static electronic records. The Act was not designed to address the practical, technical, and privacy challenges local governments face from potential requests of hundreds of hours of accumulated body-worn camera video, all of which must be subjected to real time attorney review and redaction where appropriate.

For years, Maryland has struggled and failed to enact a set of clear guidelines for releasing body-worn camera footage under the state's Public Information Act or to put forth resources to help enable greater use of body-worn cameras. And for years, our organizations have advocated for establishing a structure that promotes transparency while protecting individual privacy without being cost prohibitive.

MML and MACo believe solving these pending, but important, matters can help promote more widespread use of body-worn cameras while remedying fears of overwhelming cost burdens. We hope to participate in ongoing conversations toward successful solutions.