

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
October 13, 2022

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Police Body Cameras Statement from ACCESS/RI

ACCESS/Rhode Island, a coalition of non-profit organizations working to ensure the work of our government is transparent, would like to weigh in on the rules and regulations relating to body cameras worn by police. As important as the deployment of body-worn cameras to law enforcement officers in Rhode Island is to ensuring oversight and transparency in policing practices, that transparency and oversight is only as meaningful as the public's ability to access the critical footage and information that is collected by this technology.

While the policy deployed by the Department of Public Safety and the Attorney General's office puts in place a structure for these cameras, it remains deficient in strong standards which would provide for timely release of footage relating to incidents that the public should have quick access to, including in situations where there has been serious use of force.

Currently, the policy only provides a vague and imprecise expected timeframe for release of such footage and does not encourage prompt release. Attorney General Neronha appropriately noted (in a news conference yesterday afternoon announcing the awarding of grants to police departments for the use of body cameras) that the public expects to see what is happening on the streets. For this to happen, robust standards for release to the public of high-interest or highly publicized incidents must be put in place. Otherwise, this program does not provide accountability and transparency in the manner which it has been put in place to do so.

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