

PRESS RELEASE

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**Evidence From Body-Worn Cameras Has Significant Effects
On Prosecutorial Decision Making, Outcomes**
Findings Vary by Characteristics of Offense

Evidence tied to criminal cases is often crucial to case outcomes, and recent technological advances have created new tools for collecting and disseminating evidence. Chiefly among these are body-worn cameras (BWCs). In a new study, researchers examined how evidence from BWCs in one U.S. jurisdiction affected prosecutorial decision making and case outcomes. The study found that BWC evidence had significant effects on case-processing outcomes, but these effects depended on the characteristics of the offense.

The study was conducted by researchers at the University of North Carolina (UNC) at Charlotte, Pennsylvania State University, the University of Maryland, and George Mason University. It appears in a special issue of *Criminology & Public Policy*, a publication of the American Society of Criminology, on prosecutors and prosecutorial decision making.

“In many U.S. jurisdictions, most criminal cases include BWC evidence, but there has been limited research on how this evidence affects case outcomes,” explains Kevin Petersen, assistant professor of criminal justice and criminology at UNC Charlotte, who led the study. “There is also little information available to help prosecutors determine which cases are most likely to benefit from this form of evidence.”

Using data from 2016 to 2022, researchers examined nearly 30,000 prosecution cases from the Baltimore City (Maryland) State’s Attorney’s Office, a large urban jurisdiction, to estimate the effect of BWC evidence on a range of prosecutorial outcomes; Baltimore City began using BWCs in May 2016. The cases included a combination of felony and misdemeanor offenses, but generally involved serious crimes with the possibility of a prison sentence.

BWC evidence affected the likelihood of decisions to decline prosecution and guilty pleas, reduced case-processing times, and altered incarceration sentences after guilty pleas, the study found. These effects depended on the type of crime and were strongest for on-view arrests (i.e., in which police arrest someone without a prior warrant because they witness the offense), burglaries, domestic cases, and crimes committed against law enforcement officers. The findings can help prosecutors prioritize when to use BWC evidence, in some cases hiring additional staff and in others using artificial intelligence to review footages.

Among the study’s limitations, the authors point out that their measure of BWC evidence did not necessarily indicate actual use by prosecutors, only that footage was recorded and made available. In addition, their analyses examined only circuit court cases, which typically involve serious felony offenses; impacts on other types of cases may differ. And they studied a single jurisdiction, making it unclear whether their findings generalize to other areas.

“The rapid adoption of BWCs has strained the resources of local prosecutors’ offices,” notes Petersen. “Establishing whether and under what conditions BWC footage provides useful evidence during prosecution is critical to informing decisions about the costs and benefits of adopting BWCs, as well as the development of evidence-based practices for using BWC footage



during court processes.”

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Summarized from *Criminology & Public Policy*, *The Prosecutor’s Cut: Body-Worn Camera Evidence and Criminal Case Dispositions*, by Petersen, K (University of North Carolina at Charlotte), Galvin, MA (Pennsylvania State University), Johnson, BD (University of Maryland), and Redlich, AD (George Mason University). Copyright 2026 The Authors. All rights reserved.