



EFF-Austin

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Community groups met: no movement on public release of video but other modifications of body camera policy likely

AUSTIN, TX -- This week community group leaders met with city legal, APD and a representative of the Travis County District Attorney's office.

After more than two hours of deep discussion, city staff agreed that Austin can legally be more transparent than it is today within the parameters of SB 158. The City could legally release body camera video earlier and with greater clarity around the rules, but staff is reluctant to make any change from the way video is currently handled.

"It became clear from the discussion that City Legal and APD could release video earlier and in a new framework, but they just don't want to," said Fatima Mann of the Austin Justice Coalition. "They were unwilling to contemplate even rapid release to family members of someone who has been shot."

"Public access to body worn camera video is critical if we hope that this program will build trust between law enforcement and the community," said Matt Simpson of the ACLU of Texas.

"Although APD is focused on using body camera footage in investigations and prosecutions, we think Chief Acevedo and City Council can also ensure the program builds public trust by ensuring timely and transparent video release policies."

"APD and city legal seem to think it's possible to have real transparency and accountability when video won't be released until after the completion of both administrative and criminal processes," said Kathy Mitchell of the Texas Criminal Justice Coalition. "Those processes can take a year or more for critical incidents like a shooting. We think it's important to demonstrate

transparency and build community trust during the period after an incident when the public is engaged and community groups are seeking reassurance that police are working for them, not against them."

"I was surprised at how difficult it was to talk about even narrow areas for release of video, like getting it to the parents of someone who has been in an altercation with an officer," said Carly Jackson, Texans for Accountable Government. "If I'm a parent, I want to see what happened even if my kid is now over 18. The city had a lot of reasons why that wasn't possible either."

"City Council has passed a resolution that will continue a dialog between community groups and APD for a 120 day period," said Simpson. "We intend to participate fully in that dialog and I hope that process can bring a change in how city staff views transparency and public information."

"On other topics, we are making progress," said Mann. "APD has agreed in principle to changes in the body camera policy providing some guidance around when to turn off their cameras. APD has begun address concerns around the policing of non-criminal activities like protests and rallies. Unfortunately, with regards to how and to whom footage will be release, APD seems satisfied with the status quo. We, the community, deserve a policy that will allow us to trust APD. We require more than the status quo, because we want APD desire to serve the community as much as they protect us."

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