

JOE DAVIS, SR.

Alderman, 2nd District

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After further review: Policies on why and when to deploy police body cameras need to be vetted

Statement of Alderman Joe Davis, Sr. September 2, 2015

The proposed purchase of body cameras for the entire patrol division of the Milwaukee Police Department is a foolish idea. Recent instances in which the department has experienced critical technology failures should absolutely cause us to move forward cautiously. If the crash of a system like MediaSolv can compromise critical data for law enforcement and the judicial system, we should be asking serious questions about the reliability and practicality we would be getting for our investment of taxpayer dollars. This is just one reason why I think a pilot program would be a better means of moving forward.

Another concern is that individual officers will be given the discretion to turn the cameras on or off as circumstances dictate. Given the extremely stressful conditions that our officers have to endure amid the current increase in violent crime, we don't know whether such a policy would be an effective use of this technology.

It seems to me that by giving officers the discretion to turn their cameras off, we are also undermining one of the most important goals of this initiative—earning the trust of our minority communities and bridging the divide between police and people of color. The technology exists to activate and deactivate the cameras automatically, based on proximity to the squad car, but the mayor's initiative fails to explore that option.

Until the department has a set of procedures in place and policies established, this proposal from the mayor is another attempt to spend tax dollars like a drunken sailor. I am confident that my colleagues on the Common Council will see through this irrational proposal and choose to pursue well-defined outcomes and objectives, instead of an overtly political response to a public safety crisis.

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