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Aug. 25, 2020

To: House Equitable Justice System and Law Enforcement Reform Committee
From: South Carolina Press Association
Subject: Police Body Cameras

Dear Subcommittee Members:

Thank you for your service in discussion of police reform in South Carolina.

You face many issues, but it is the position of the SCPA that one of the most important ones is the expeditious opening up to public view police body cameras videos when violence is involved.

Access to body cameras is a provision that the Press Association has advocated for several years... and we have lost. The law enforcement lobby has claimed it would bring about invasion of privacy problems, and they were successful in having body cam videos exempted entirely from the FOIA.

In light of the current outrage at police misconduct, SCPA Attorney Taylor Smith has drafted language removing the body cam exemption from the FOIA. It is attached.

We also want any proposed legislation to include the requirement that police wear and activate the cameras when confronting citizens.

It is our position that the only reason the public knows about the George Floyd murder is because of a citizen video. And we only knew of the shooting death of Walter Scott in North Charleston because of a citizen video. The list of similar cases is long.

In the interest of police transparency, we advocate that the law must change.

We ask you to include the attached wording in your recommendations.

Thank you. Please contact me or Mr. Smith if you have questions.

William C. Rogers
Executive Director
S.C. Press Association/S.C. Newspaper Network