

Detroit police have 'widespread' problem of not turning on body cameras, commissioner says



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Amid disagreement between Detroit police leadership and the Board of Police Commissioners over body camera policy, a commissioner this week revealed a reason behind a curious vote taken in December 2022.

Police Chief James White had recommended unpaid suspension for Sgt. Marvin Anthony, who was in charge of officers involved in the fatal shooting of Ki'Azia Miller in November 2022. Miller suffered from schizophrenia and the violent incident rose questions about the way police handle mental health crises.

The board shot down White's recommendation, voting against suspending Anthony without pay after closed-door discussions, with no public explanation. Anthony was instead suspended with pay.

Commissioner Ricardo Moore told the Free Press this week that Anthony did not have his body-worn camera turned on during the incident.

Moore said because commissioners had no visual or audio evidence, the oversight board could not properly determine the extent of Anthony's alleged wrongdoing.

Anthony's case is an example of what Moore described as a widespread problem of officers not turning on their body cameras. Moore said there's an "intentional" lack of discipline and enforcement of the department's body camera policy.

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"The whole purpose of the body-worn cameras is to prevent police corruption. It didn't look like anyone cared, from the bottom of the organization to the top," Moore said of the Detroit Police Department.

"It's like an epidemic within the organization. It's like an institutional betrayal — it's ignored and accepted."

It's Detroit police policy that officers who have "citizen interactions in the daily performances of their duty" are mandated to wear body worn cameras, with some exceptions that include privacy issues and investigative procedures. The policy also states that the entirety of all significant interactions with citizens must be recorded.

The board voted in January on a motion presented by Vice Chair Annie Holt to allow the commission to presume misconduct by police officers if there is no body camera footage to refute a complaint against them, according to Victoria Shah, the board secretary.

Both Moore and Shah told the Free Press that the reason behind that motion was a large number of citizen complaints being met with a lack of body camera footage.

"Is it the right thing to assume the police officer is telling the truth but the citizen isn't? That doesn't seem right," Shah said. "We need to believe the citizen."

Detroit Police Chief James White, however, wrote a letter to the board expressing frustration with the vote.

White described the vote as an "extreme position" that "clearly violates" the due process rights of police officers per their collective bargaining agreement, according to the letter obtained by the Free Press.

White said the police department has a "strong policy" of requiring officers to activate their body cameras during fieldwork, but wrote that "given the unique nature of police work, there may be situations where it is not practical for the (body camera) to be activated, a member makes a good-faith effort to activate the (body camera) but was unsuccessful, or where the (body camera) itself malfunctions, shuts off, or deactivates."

The commission's Office of the Chief Investigator confirmed it has sustained complaints against officers for procedural violations of the department's body-worn camera policy, which can lead to disciplinary action.

The chief said he would set aside discipline of officers stemming from complaints sustained by the commission based solely on a lack of body camera footage, and that findings of guilt will be left out of personnel files.

"Investigative discretion is necessary," White wrote. "I also have a duty to ensure that all DPD members are protected from one-sided investigative practices that will make them flinch in the face of danger out of fear of unwarranted discipline."

Rev. Jerome Warfield, appointed in May to serve as the commission's chief investigator, said many of the investigations into complaints he has reviewed do include body camera footage, but he is concerned about cases that do lack video and audio evidence that could support a complaint or exonerate an officer.

"I expect all officers to have those body worn cameras on," Warfield said.

Detroit police are currently transitioning to a new body camera system, according to a statement issued by the department Friday in response to questions on body cameras not always being activated on crime scenes:

"Chief White is fully committed to transparency and made the purchase of new body worn cameras a priority. Currently, the Department is transitioning from its current body worn camera system to newer model cameras as a result of an \$11.3 million contract signed in 2021. This will provide every officer with his or her own body worn camera, increasing transparency and accountability, and offering technical upgrades over the previous system."

Detroit Police Lieutenants and Sergeants Association President Mark Young did not respond to requests for comment. Attempts to reach Anthony were unsuccessful.

Detroit police have not released body camera footage that may exist in the Miller shooting.

In video footage recorded by Miller moments before the shooting, she says to an officer seemingly hiding behind a tree in her front yard: "You had a gun pointed on me because you all got a phone call. Are you serious? You all came with guns drawn. ... You all prepared to shoot, right?"

The officer responds that the police on scene don't want to get hurt. Then a second officer aggressively and abruptly enters the home. The video then becomes shaky. The audio becomes muffled, but it sounds like the officer then yells, "Show your goddamned hands," "Don't reach for that goddamned gun," and the video ends.

Miller's family has [spoken out against the killing](#), demanding justice and accountability.

Anthony's suspension was lifted in March. He was taken off the streets and assigned administrative work following his suspension, according to Detroit police. White previously said Anthony wasn't directly involved in the shooting, but said he holds supervisors to a higher standard.

Two other officers were initially suspended by White. Moore said one suspension was lifted, and the Board of Police Commissioners voted to suspend the other without pay. No officers have been charged in Miller's death.

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