



128 Dorrance Street, Suite 400
Providence, RI 02903
Phone: (401) 831-7171
Fax: (401) 831-7175
www.riaclu.org
info@riaclu.org

ACLU OF RI POSITION: SUPPORT/AMEND

TESTIMONY ON 25-S 811, RELATING TO STATE AFFAIRS AND GOVERNMENT -- THE BODY CAMERAS FOR CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES ACT -- THE WILLIE WASHINGTON, JR. ACT April 3, 2025

This legislation would require ACI correctional staff to wear and use body-worn cameras (BWC) for recording certain interactions with the incarcerated population, such as use of force incidents and disciplinary proceedings. Because, as with police body cameras, we believe BWCs can promote accountability in the correctional setting and serve as a useful oversight tool both for correctional officers and for those who are incarcerated, we consider the deployment of BWCs to be a positive step.

At the same time, absent the right protections – including assurances as to when the cameras may be turned on and off – use of the devices can be very problematic in the confined setting of a prison where a person cannot avoid being recorded. As written, the bill appears to give correctional officers broad discretion as to when to activate the cameras. Whether done surreptitiously or overtly, such recordings could significantly invade the privacy rights of prisoners while they are in their cells, shower rooms or other locations. We would therefore urge amendments to the legislation to set clear and narrow circumstances when BWC activation is allowed in order to ensure against its misuse or abuse.

There are two other amendments we would ask the committee to consider. The bill would, appropriately, allow prisoners to view recordings that directly involve them – but only under “appropriate” circumstances. It would be helpful to expand on the meaning of this term so that individuals are not arbitrarily denied access to recordings involving their own interaction with guards.

Finally, we note that the bill provides for “potential civil liabilities” against correctional officers who violate the statute. However, no specifics are provided about what these liabilities might be or how they can be pursued. Here again we would urge that more details be provided so that people who are affected by violations of the statute have clear legal remedies delineated.

Thank you for considering our views.