

LONG ISLANDNASSAU

Nassau County Executive Laura Curran announces bodycam purchases for all 2,500 police officers



Nassau County Executive Laura Curran announced Thursday that county uniformed police officers and supervisors will wear body cameras on patrol beginning this fall. Credit: Howard Schnapp

By Candice Ferrette

candice.ferrette@newsday.com @candiceferrette

Updated May 27, 2021 7:18 PM

Nassau County Executive Laura Curran on Thursday announced the purchase of 2,500 body cameras for all county uniformed police officers and supervisors to wear as "a proven tool for accountability, safety and improved officer performance."

Island Tech Services of Ronkonkoma has been selected to provide the county police department with the cameras, along with training, technical support and the ability to upload encrypted evidence to a secure cloud-based system from about 400 patrol vehicles, officials said.

"Nationwide there has been a call and there continues to be a call to improve policing. And we've heard that call in Nassau," Curran said in front of the county building in Mineola.

She also announced the launch of a diversity committee for police hiring in response to a Newsday investigation that found Long Island's police forces disqualified Black and Hispanic recruits at higher rates than white applicants.

Curran said the new committee will be charged with examining three areas of police hiring: recruitment, testing and training.

The Nassau and Suffolk County police departments are among the only large departments in the nation without the widespread use of officer body-worn cameras.

Nassau County police officers each would receive \$3,000 annually to wear body cameras when the PBA approves a new labor agreement with the county.

The estimated cost to fully implement the police body-worn camera program by the end of the year is approximately \$5 million, county officials said.

Curran said the goal is to build trust between police and the communities they serve "and body cameras help build that trust" by helping to resolve complaints and improve police training.

"Given that police now operate in a world where anyone with a cellphone can record footage of a police encounter — and we've all seen that — body-worn cameras help ensure events are also captured from an officer's perspective," Curran said.

Administration officials said they have been reviewing vendors since last June.

Each vendor was invited to present their products and services to members of the three county police unions: the Detectives' Association Incorporated, the Police Benevolent Association and the Superior Officers Association.

Vendors also were invited to make presentations to the Nassau district attorney's office, the county police department and the county offices of Information Technology, Management & Budget, Minority Affairs and Shared Services.

The high-definition body cameras weigh about 5 ounces and will be worn as part of the uniform.

Police Commissioner Patrick Ryder said he expected the number of complaints and lawsuits against police officers will go down, citing a trend in Freeport Village, where cameras are in use.

"The video actually speaks. The video can't lie," Ryder said. "We hope and we know with our professional officers it will go the same direction."

Ryder said police officers "are absolutely fine" with wearing the cameras.

"They know they are professional and they want the world to see that," Ryder said.

Civil rights attorney Frederick K. Brewington said police body cameras "are only one small aspect of better policing" and he hopes "strict procedures are put in place before they [the cameras] are pinned on the officers."

"Body cameras don't mean a thing unless you change the culture," said Brewington, who was among the authors of a police reform document called "The People's Plan" that was submitted to the state last month.

Ryder said bodycams will be in use by all patrol officers in one police precinct by September, and "by the end of the year [county police] will all be wearing body cameras."



By Candice Ferrette

candice.ferrette@newsday.com @candiceferrette

Candice Ferrette covers Nassau County government and politics on Long Island. She has been a reporter at Newsday since 2011.