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Nassau, PBA sign agreement on police body cameras



Nassau County Executive Laura Curran holds a police body camera in Mineola in May. Credit: Howard Schnapp

By Nicole Fuller

nicole.fuller@newsday.com @NicoleFuller

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Nassau County has reached an agreement with the county's largest police union that will clear the way for the police department's patrol officers to wear body cameras beginning this fall and receive \$3,000 a year each for doing so.

The Nassau Police Benevolent Association and the county, which are locked in contract negotiations after the PBA's membership voted down a contract proposal last year, have signed a memorandum of understanding that authorizes the county to make the payments to the officers. The memorandum estimates the agreement will cost county taxpayers \$8 million annually.

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Police supervisors, who have their own union, are also receiving \$3,000 payments upon implementation of the body camera program.

The PBA's executive board unanimously approved the May 26 memorandum on Tuesday, according to the agreement. The Nassau Interim Finance Authority and the Nassau County Legislature also must approve it. A legislative committee is scheduled to vote on Monday.



Nassau PBA President James McDermott speaks coronavirus and testing in Mineola in April 2020. Credit: Howard Schnapp

"My members realized that body cameras are the future; it's part of reform," James McDermott, president of the Nassau PBA, said in an interview Friday. "We were never against it."

Nassau County Executive Laura Curran, in a statement Friday, said: "This is an important step that will promote greater transparency and accountability in policing, and will help continue building trust in all our communities."

The memorandum of understanding allows the county's approximately 1,600 patrol officers, who have been without a contract since the end of 2017, to proceed with the body camera program while negotiations continue on their overall labor contract.

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The memorandum details that officers participating in the body camera program will receive 26 payments over the course of the year. The agreement does not lay out which officers might be exempt from wearing cameras but said "the parties intend that each and every active member will receive such payment except when such member is not participating in the program due to extenuating circumstances." The agreement does not elaborate.

The PBA agreed, as part of the memorandum, to withdraw its pending labor complaint regarding body cameras within 30 days of "full and final ratification of this agreement."

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Curran announced last month that the county had purchased 2,500 body cameras for a program she said will cost an initial \$5 million. Curran said Nassau police officers will begin wearing body cameras in September and the program will be fully rolled out by the end of the year.

Civil rights attorney Frederick K. Brewington, who resigned in frustration from the county's community advisory panel on police reform because he said the county was not truly collaborating with the community, said Friday that while body cameras could provide some police accountability, the county needs an independent civilian complaint review board and an inspector general to investigate alleged police misconduct.

"I do not believe police should be receiving additional funds for wearing a piece of equipment they claim is going to be a benefit to both the public and to police," said Brewington, a member of the Long Island Advocates for Police Accountability. "They're not getting paid extra to wear their gun. They're not getting paid extra to wear their bullet proof vest. But yet, they want to get paid for this."

County Legislature Minority Leader Kevan M. Abrahams (D-Freeport) said, "While this agreement demonstrates a high-level of willingness to bring this best practice in law enforcement to Nassau County, it also serves as an acknowledgment that there is more work to be done."





Recruits at a Nassau County Police Department graduation. Credit: Anthony J. Causi

Newsday reported earlier this year that the Nassau and Suffolk police departments were among just three large police departments across the country that did not equip its officers with the bodycam technology. The Freeport Police Department was the first in New York State to give its patrol force body cameras.

Following the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis police custody in May 2020, Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo required municipalities with police departments to update their policies or risk losing state funding. Both Nassau and Suffolk counties incorporated police body camera usage into their reform plans.

Nassau selected Island Tech Services of Ronkonkoma to provide the cameras, as well as training and technical support. The cameras' video footage will be uploaded to a secure cloud-based system from about 400 patrol vehicles, county officials have said.



By Nicole Fuller

nicole.fuller@newsday.com [@NicoleFuller](https://twitter.com/NicoleFuller)

Nicole Fuller is Newsday's senior criminal justice reporter. She began working at Newsday in 2012 and previously covered local government.