



Testimony in SUPPORT of SB 360 Senate Judiciary Committee

Good Morning Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee. I'm Kent Cornish, President of the Kansas Association of Broadcasters, a trade association representing nearly 260 radio and television stations in Kansas.

This bill should not be construed as one that pits the media against law enforcement. Because this bill is about the public's right to know what happened, when law enforcement is involved in the shooting of a citizen, or the use of force that results in great bodily harm or death. The media is the conduit from newsworthy events to the public.

This past year, there were two very tragic instances where someone died as the result of law enforcement officers discharging their weapons. One in Topeka and one in Wichita. They were both recorded by body camera video and both created major concern and heightened publicity for the people in those communities. Yet how law enforcement decided to handle the recorded scenes with the public was very different. Topeka waited several months to not only release parts of it to the public, but also to allow the family of the deceased to view it.

Wichita, meanwhile, released the video in less than 24 hours. Two highly respected police departments doing what they thought was right, but clearly with different mindsets. In Topeka the investigation determined the officer's actions were warranted. My assumption is that most of the time, video from an officer's camera will show that he or she acted appropriately and that there was no need to block release of the footage. But if officers are wrong – then they should own it and learn from it. Now that establishes trust with a community.

If followed, this law would provide law enforcement with clear direction on how to be transparent to the taxpayers of their community. And privacy exceptions are written in.

Body cameras should serve both citizens and law enforcement. In the wake of several high publicity shootings, it is important to remember citizens called for departments to purchase cameras and even held fundraisers to pay for them. They viewed the technology as a tool for transparency. In addition to the education and training it offers agencies, law enforcement too should see this as a way to be transparent. If law enforcement withholds video, the public is likely to interpret this as betraying a principal point of the cameras.

Thank you for your time and I look forward to your support of SB 360.

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