

July 26, 2018

The Honorable Muriel Bowser
Mayor, District of Columbia
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004

Re: Body-Worn Camera Footage of June 13 and June 25 MPD Actions on Sheriff Road NE

Dear Mayor Bowser:

We, the undersigned organizations, urge you to release the body-worn camera (BWC) footage of two recent interactions between Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) officers and members of the public that took place on June 13, 2018, and June 25, 2018, in the Deanwood neighborhood of 5200 Sheriff Road NE.

On Wednesday, June 13, several MPD police officers from MPD's Gun Recovery Unit exited an unmarked car and confronted a group of young men who were sitting outside Nook's barbershop at 5214 Sheriff Road NE. Cell phone video of the incident was posted online and went viral. On June 25, MPD officers returned to the same block and were involved in a violent confrontation with community members that resulted in MPD police officers pepper-spraying residents, including a small child, and several arrests. All charges against those arrested were dismissed.

These incidents have been the subject of widespread public outrage and have received significant news coverage. In response to the community's calls for answers, the D.C. Council's Judiciary Committee recently held a public hearing on policing and public safety on July 12, where the footage of the June 13 incident was played.

MPD Chief Peter Newsham testified at this hearing that every one of the officers in the video had a BWC and stated, "one thing that I would urge our community to do is to gather all of the facts on any single incident before you pass judgment." However, MPD has failed to release BWC footage to support his testimony, and recently denied a FOIA request submitted by the ACLU-DC to release this footage.¹

The stated intent of the BWC Program is "to promote accountability and transparency, foster improved police-community relations, and ensure the safety of both MPD members and the public."² At your 2016 State of the District address, you championed the District's body-worn

¹ The ACLU-DC is appealing this denial.

² 24 D.C.M.R. § 3900.2

camera program as “the most progressive - and most transparent [...] in the country. Because we believe that transparency and accountability strengthen our community.”³

But BWC use will not on its own improve police transparency and accountability. When MPD frames the narrative around an issue of great public interest but refuses to release BWC footage to allow the public an opportunity to “gather all of the facts” or assess the validity of the agency’s narrative, it has failed to be transparent. This failure is corrosive to the trust between community members and police.

The recent events in Deanwood are part of a pattern and practice of ongoing negative and violent police interactions with the community, some of which have resulted in the deaths of D.C. residents, and all of which have further eroded the community’s trust in law enforcement.

The release of the BWC footage of the Deanwood violent incidents with appropriate privacy redactions to protect the identities of civilians in the videos would go a long way toward demonstrating a sincere commitment to transparency and rebuilding trust.

As mayor, you have to unique power to order the release of BWC footage of incidents that are of “significant public interest.”⁴ We ask that you exercise this power and release BWC footage of the Deanwood neighborhood incidents on June 13 and June 25.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

ACLU of the District of Columbia

Black Lives Matter DC

Black Youth Project 100

Break the Cycle

DC Statehood Green Party

HIPS

Jewish Voice for Peace DC

³ <https://mayor.dc.gov/node/1149292>

⁴ 24 D.C.M.R. § 3900.10. <http://dcrules.elaws.us/dcmr/24-3900>

Justice For Muslims Collective

#KeepDC4Me

Law 4 Black Lives DC

ONE DC

Positive Force DC

Stop Police Terror Project-DC

Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless