

## Bibb sheriff's office nearing selection of 100 body cameras



WOODY MARSHALL/THE TELEGRAPH Clay Williams is one of the deputies testing two different body camera systems for the Bibb County Sheriff's Office. The camera has several different mounting options from eyeglasses to hats, and even epaulets on a deputy's shoulder. **WOODY MARSHALL** [wmarshall@macon.com](mailto:wmarshall@macon.com)

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Bibb County sheriff's Deputy Clay Williams knows the value of having cameras rolling while on the job.

Recorded videos from his patrol car have cleared the 15-year veteran officer in two false rape allegations and an alleged excessive use of force.

"I use it if I'm transporting a female. It's just added protection," he said.

He is one of several deputies who have been evaluating body cameras since mid-summer.

Sheriff David Davis said he plans to order 100 of them with money seized through settlements from recent gambling raids at convenience stores, as well as grants and money earmarked in the budget.

Davis expects to spend \$150,000 to \$200,000 to outfit deputies by January and provide for data storage.

"Once you start down this path, you're committing yourself to costs down the road," he said.

Williams is already sold.

"Me personally, I love the idea because it gives me an extra added bonus of protection," he said. "People can come back and say an officer did something that he didn't."

Williams is using Taser's Axon Flex point-of-view model, which has a camera that is separate from the battery pack that slips into his pocket.

A tap on the box turns on the camera and backs up to store the last 30 seconds of video before it was activated.

Once the camera is turned on, it will record audio and video that cannot be altered by the officer, Williams said.

"We can't edit it any way, we cannot delete it. Even when it is downloaded at the data ports, we still cannot have any access to edit, delete or extend it in anyway, nor would the sheriff's office."

The lens is mounted at the end of an about 4-inch-long data storage unit.

It magnetically clips on in a variety of ways to capture the perspective from the officer's point of view.

Williams, who is a towering figure nearing 7 feet tall in his campaign hat, is trying out several options.

He can clip it to his sunglasses, motorcycle helmet, sheriff's issue ball cap or attach it to the epaulet on his shoulder.

The camera also can be attached to SWAT helmets and tactical vests. There also are headbands and collar mounts.

His camera mimics the human eye as much as possible to give prosecutors and jurors a clearer picture of what the officer was seeing at the time of an incident.

"If I need a flashlight to see, it's going to need a flashlight to see," Williams said. "The camera is not seeing in ultra high-def night vision and (not getting) to see things we can't."

The other Axon model in the final days of testing has the camera in a battery pack that attaches to the deputy's shirt or utility belt and provides a 130-degree view from chest or waist level.

Deputies who have been wearing other models of cameras have been taking notes and will submit a report for review beginning this week.

In the meantime, Davis will continue to research policy and procedures for the cameras.

"All law enforcement agencies going with body cameras are facing questions they're sorting out," he said. "So we're sort of blazing a trail as these cameras get deployed, and as we make cases there may be adaptations to state law."

People have an expectation of privacy in their homes, but officers there on official business should be able to use them, Davis said.

"People have come to expect them now," he said.

On raids where search warrants have been secured, SWAT members can document what they are seeing and hearing as they make their way in.

Williams has discovered that the camera can make a difference in how the public behaves toward him.

"They'll have an attitude ... and they'll stop and look at the side of my face and see the mount and they'll start changing their attitude," he said. "They're more compliant, they're more agreeable, so they do work in cutting down the complaints and the aggression toward officers."

Davis expects other deputies to embrace the cameras, which will be issued as part of their personal gear.

"The deputies realize it's a help to them because it shows what happens, and it also has a calming effect on people who are a little bit agitated."

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