

COLORADO MATTERS

How Police Body Cams Help A Civil Rights Attorney's Cases



BY MICHAEL DE YOANNA
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[LISTEN](#) Audio: Siddhartha Rathod Speaks With Ryan Warner



An officer was fired and later pleaded guilty to attempted assault after his body camera recorded a confrontation with arrestee Kent Lasnik, pictured bleeding as he is pushed into a restraining chair.

(Screen capture of Federal Heights police body camera video)

Last December, after he'd been arrested in Federal Heights north of Denver, Kent Lasnik was getting shoved

around and pushed into a cell when he cursed and threw his arm at an officer. That's when he was punched repeatedly, pinned down, and finally, while bleeding, put in a restraining chair.

"I'm sorry!" Lasnik pleaded. "I won't do nothing else."

Then an officer squeezed Lasnik's temples while he was still strapped to the chair.

We know about Lasnik's treatment because the incident was captured by police body cameras. And it led to the firing of Federal Heights police Officer Mark Magness. He's since pleaded guilty to attempted assault on Lasnik.

More CPR News reporting on police body cameras:

- [Body Cams Can Catch Abuse Or Clear Officers' Names](#)
- [How The Technology Changed Police Work In Two Cities](#)
- [The Facts And Background On Colorado's Body Cameras](#)

Siddhartha H. Rathod, a civil rights attorney with the Rathod and Mohamedbhai law firm in Denver, represents Lasnik and said that case shows how body cameras are transforming police work.

Take the example of the 30-day suspension of Denver police Officer Choice Johnson, who wore a body camera as part of a pilot program, Rathod said. Johnson did not have his body camera on during an altercation at The 1up, a lower downtown Denver bar where he was working as an off-duty guard in his police uniform.

The incident was caught on a HALO street camera. It showed Johnson shove a bar patron to the ground. And on March 23, a police disciplinary action statement said Johnson violated department regulations banning the use of inappropriate force.

"Officer Johnson has not taken responsibility for his actions and the level of force he used was grossly disproportionate to the circumstances he faced," the statement said.

Johnson is appealing the suspension in Denver's civil service process.

Denver police expect to have 800 body cameras in use before the end of the year, but off-duty officers will not be required to wear them during their guard work where they are paid by banks, bars and other such places, said Denver police spokesman Sonny Jackson.

"Well, initially it will be cost prohibitive," Jackson said. "We won't be able to afford to get these cameras for the officers that are working off duty. So, the plan is to get [them to] officers working on duty and then, as we get the program going, and we get additional funding, we'll consider putting them on officers who are working off duty."

That approach worries Rathod, who spoke with Colorado Matters host Ryan. Click on the audio link above to hear the full conversation, or read edited highlights, below.

Why Rathod thinks officers should wear body cams during off-duty work:

"Unfortunately, a lot of the assaults committed by officers happen in these off-duty capacity type scenarios where they are working as, in essence, bouncers for bars, but they're wearing their full uniform, they're armed, and they have the authority to arrest someone."

How Lasnik found out the incident was on body cam:

"He found out, through the criminal process, as this officer -- officer Magness -- was being charged. We were part of the group that spoke to him and showed him the video of what happened to him and it was really emotional for him... to see that level of force being used against him."

How body camera audio is a game changer:

"Every single one of these cases that's caught on video -- surveillance video -- the officer is defended in the same way: Despite the fact that the video shows the officer brutalizing someone, they say, 'Well, you can't hear what was being said. You can't see what I was seeing.' But now with body cameras, you can see what the officer was seeing and you can hear exactly what the officer was saying."

Police Body Cameras

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