

# The Star-Ledger

## **N.J.'s top lawmakers support spending \$58M to buy body cams for cops after Murphy vetoes**

By Blake Nelson

NJ Advance Media for NJ.com and The Star-Ledger

Published Oct. 26, 2020

New Jersey's two most powerful lawmakers said Monday they support spending tens of millions of dollars to equip cops statewide with body cameras, after the governor said he wouldn't sign bills requiring the equipment without more funding.

Gov. Phil Murphy vetoed two bills last week, partially because one of the proposals (S1163) didn't set aside enough money to buy an estimated 26,000 new cameras.

In response, state Senate President Stephen Sweeney, D-Gloucester, joined other lawmakers to sponsor a bill setting aside \$58 million, according to a draft of the legislation obtained by NJ Advance Media.

"Public safety and the public's trust go hand-in-hand," Sweeney said in a joint statement with Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin, who also supported the new funding. "Body cams are an effective tool for providing transparency and accountability for law enforcement and building trusting relations in the communities they serve."

The money should be enough to cover the equipment and initial storage costs for every department in the state, but it would not necessarily pay for ongoing maintenance, according to Murphy's office.

In an interview Thursday, Barnegat Police Chief Keith Germain said body cameras helped save his department time and money.

"Body cameras, beyond providing accountability, make us a more efficient operation," he said. He estimated that internal investigations were often completed 90% faster with cameras.

"In most cases, it's pretty clear right from the video, whether things were done properly or whether there are issues we need to address," he said.

The funding bill was also sponsored by state Sens. Joe Cryan, D-Union, and Shirley Turner, D-Mercer, according to a press release. An Assembly version was sponsored by Assemblyman Benjie Wimberly, D-Passaic.

The legislative leaders did not address Murphy's other concern, that one of the body camera bills (A4312) did not do enough to protect the privacy of residents caught on camera.

Most police departments do not have body cameras, according to a recent state survey.