

The Star-Ledger

Cops in N.J. would get \$59M to spend on body cameras as bill advances

By Blake Nelson

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

Published Nov. 12, 2020

Lawmakers in state Senate and Assembly committees on Thursday approved spending around \$59 million to equip every cop in the state with a body camera.

“Body cameras can help increase public trust,” state Sen. Joe Cryan, D-Union, and a co-sponsor of the bill said. “As a former sheriff, I can tell you I referred to body cameras for footage that cleared officers.”

Cameras are also “exposing instances of police misconduct” and can help hold officers accountable, state Sen. Shirley Turner, D-Mercer, and another co-sponsor added.

The Legislature previously approved a bill (S1163) generally requiring every New Jersey officer use a camera, since most departments still do not have them. Gov. Phil Murphy expressed support for the idea in general, but he said he wouldn’t sign it until lawmakers set aside more money to buy about 26,000 new cameras and cover storage costs.

The funding proposal would also allow departments who have already bought cameras to apply for reimbursement, lawmakers said. The bipartisan Senate Law and Public Safety Committee approved the proposal 6-0.

The bill received a little more pushback in the Assembly Appropriations committee with two Republicans abstaining from voting, citing cost concerns.

“I am concerned about the appropriation — whether it’s enough, and conversely, do we have it to spend here in 2020?” said Assemblyman Jay Webber, R-Morris.

The other nine members voted in favor.

The funding bill has also received support from the state’s two most powerful lawmakers. It must be approved by the full Senate and Assembly before it can head to the governor’s desk.