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N.J. lawmakers approve \$58 million to buy cops body cameras statewide

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New Jersey lawmakers on Thursday approved spending \$58 million to buy body cameras for cops statewide and cover the high costs of storing voluminous amounts of footage.

Since the governor already approved a separate proposal generally requiring police to use body cameras, the funding all but guarantees that hundreds of New Jersey departments will soon be able to outfit officers with the gear, and could solidify one of the most significant policing reforms to pass the Legislature since George Floyd protests swept the state.

Thursday's bill (A4907) unanimously passed the state Senate, 40-0, and it was overwhelmingly approved by the Assembly, 65-5, with nine representatives abstaining.

Gov. Phil Murphy now must decide whether he'll sign it, but he previously signaled he supported spending the money.

Nearly 300 of the state's 537 law enforcement agencies did not have any cameras as of September, according to a state survey.

"A picture is worth a thousand words," state Senate President Stephen Sweeney, D-Gloucester and a sponsor, said in a statement. He and other supporters argue that cameras can both prove misconduct and protect officers from false accusations.

"Body cameras will help to create safer communities, and both officers and civilians will benefit greatly from rebuilding trust between police officers and the communities they have sworn to serve and protect," state Sen. Shirley Turner, D-Mercer and another sponsor said in a statement.

Both chambers voted on the bill with no debate. A few members in the Assembly previously raised concerns about spending this much money amid a pandemic.

The proposal also instructs departments to make sure the systems storing the footage are "tamper-proof" and have the ability to "securely share data."

The hundreds of departments that already bought at least some cameras would be able to apply for reimbursement starting Jan. 1, 2022.