

Fast forward the cameras to record what cops are doing

BY DAILY NEWS EDITORIALS | December 12, 2015



Candid camera for cops. (BRENDAN MCDERMID/REUTERS)

The monitor overseeing the NYPD in the wake of the stop-and-frisk lawsuit is doing a great job — only the time has come to urgently supplement his mission.

It's time for Police Commissioner Bill Bratton to speed introduction of officer-worn body cameras, plus dashboard cameras, while complying with monitor Peter Zimroth's plans.

The stop-and-frisk remedies ordered by Federal Judge Shira Scheindlin, since removed from the case, included directing Zimroth to design a program to test whether body-cams would reduce improper stops and frisks.

To meet those objectives, Zimroth this week recommended to Scheindlin's replacement, Federal Judge Analisa Torres, a plan as scientifically designed as anyone could imagine.

Now, though, the NYPD conducts next to no stops, especially compared with the nearly 700,000 it once did annually, while a new issue tops the policing agenda.

Look to Chicago to understand the rationale for speedily equipping officers with cameras and their cars with dash-cams.

The video of Officer Jason Van Dyke shooting 17-year-old Laquan McDonald provided compelling evidence of murder, yet State's Attorney Anita Alvarez delayed indictment for 400 days — until a lawsuit forced release of the horrifying images.

Because Mayor Rahm Emanuel fought in court to keep the video under wraps, he faces heated calls for resignation. And because she failed to proceed with dispatch, Alvarez destroyed the credibility of law enforcement in

that city and damaged it nationwide.

The NYPD is on track to buy 5,000 body cams, but “the earliest we can expect cameras to be in the hands of officers would be in or around the late summer of 2016,” according to a report submitted to Zimroth by the department.

Bratton is wrestling with complex issues that start with the city's procurement policies and range from having enough digital video storage capacity to protecting the privacy rights of innocent individuals who happen into camera range.

But, with more than 4,000 police agencies nationwide running or considering camera programs, Bratton must put the NYPD into high gear to complete the groundwork necessary for sending officers on patrol with cameras — before the department takes delivery of the equipment.

In hope of building trust that cops would be fairly investigated, Gov. Cuomo appointed Attorney General Eric Schneiderman as special prosecutor when a cop kills an unarmed civilian.

Schneiderman has taken charge of his first such case. It involves, according to initial reports, a running pursuit by an NYPD officer in a ravine and a struggle during which the cop's gun discharged. A camera might well have proven crucial to understanding exactly what happened.

While there are still lessons to be learned about stops and frisks, New York must add a focus on life death and justice with full vigor.