

Body-worn and Dashboard Camera Use and Trends in Wisconsin Police Agencies

Report of Data collected within 2020 Annual Law Enforcement Employee
Survey

January 2021



Bureau of Justice Information and Analysis
Wisconsin Department of Justice

Introduction

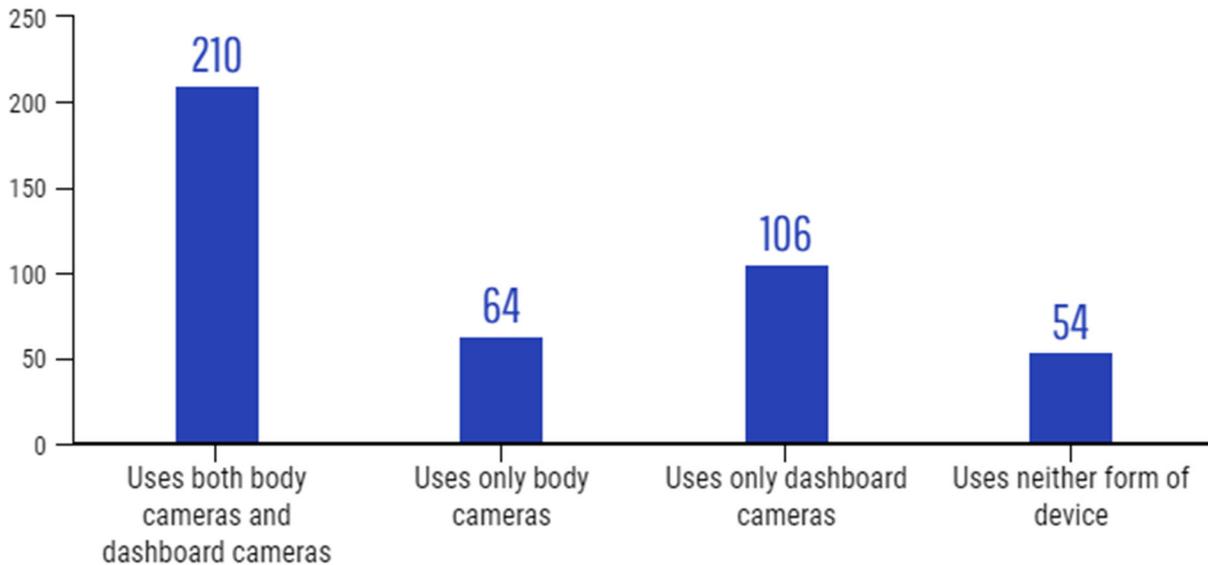
Wisconsin law enforcement agencies were asked about their usage of both body-worn and dashboard cameras as an optional addition to the annual Law Enforcement Employee Survey, through the Uniform Crime Reporting program, that was sent out in November 2020. These questions were developed to gain a better understanding of the implementation of body-worn and dashboard cameras in police departments across the state. Of the 436 agencies who responded to the survey, **434** answered the recording device section. Their responses are as follows:

Highlights

- **380** agencies (**88%** of respondents) indicated using at least one form of recording device among their officers
 - **210** agencies (**48%** of respondents) indicated using *both* dashboard and body-worn cameras
 - **170** agencies use *only one* form of device
- **208** agencies (**76%** of agencies that used body cameras) indicated they had as many body cameras as officers so that every officer who uses a body camera would have a dedicated device
- **54** agencies indicated that they do not have *any* form of recording device
 - **37** agencies (**66%**) reported being interested in the implementation of devices
 - When asked about prohibitive factors preventing the use of recording devices, **87% cited cost**
- The most frequently indicated barriers to full recording device implementation are **device cost** and the **cost of recording/preserving footage**
- Video footage of both body-worn cameras and dashboard cameras is retained for at least 90 days by most agencies
- **65%** of agencies who do not use *either* form of recording device have an agency operating budget of **less than \$1 million**



Does your agency currently use (or is in the process of implementing) recording devices for officers in the form of body cameras and/or dashboard cameras?



As shown above, **210** agencies (or **48%** of respondents) indicated that they use *both* body-worn cameras and dashboard cameras in some capacity for their officers. An additional **170** agencies (**39%** of respondents) indicated using *either* body-worn or dashboard cameras, and only **54** agencies (**12%** of respondents) indicated using *neither* form of recording device.

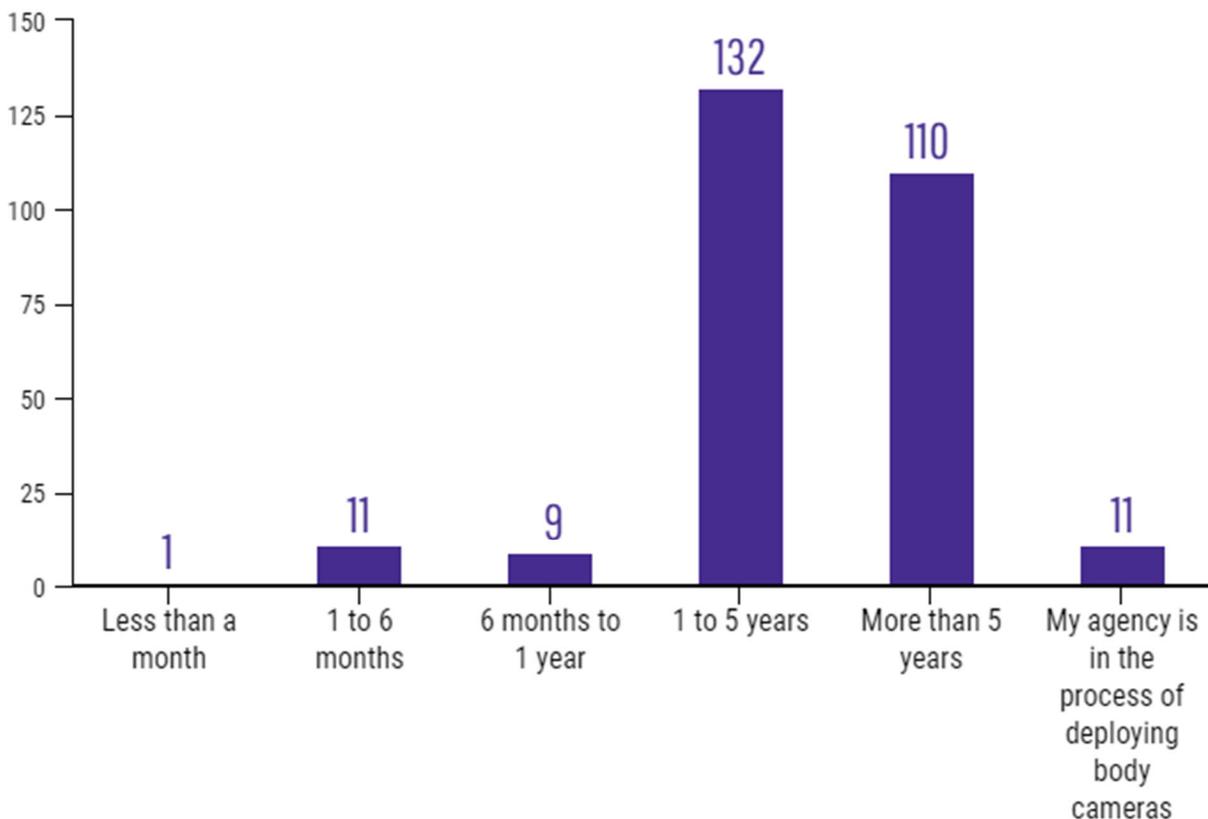
Agencies were then asked questions specific to the type of recording device they indicated using – body-worn and/or dashboard cameras. For both types, agencies were asked how long they had been using the devices, whether they had an official policy available to the public about the usage of the device, and how long they preserved device footage that was deemed unneeded (e.g. no evidence of a crime, no footage relevant to a traffic citation, etc.).

Additional questions pertaining specifically to either body-worn or dashboard cameras were asked accordingly. Agencies who indicated using neither recording device were asked if they were interested in their implementation and about the challenges preventing their implementation.

Body-worn Cameras

There were **274** agencies who confirmed using body-worn cameras for their officers. Of those, the majority (**242**, or **88%**) indicated that they had been doing so for one year or longer. **132** respondents have had body-worn cameras for one to five years, with **110** reporting usage for more than five years. Only **21** agencies have been actively using body-worn cameras for less than one year, with another **11** in the process of deploying them fully.

How long has your agency been using body cameras for officers on duty?



Agencies were then asked if they had as many body cameras as officers so that every officer who uses a body camera would have a dedicated device – **208** agencies (**76%**) indicated that they did.

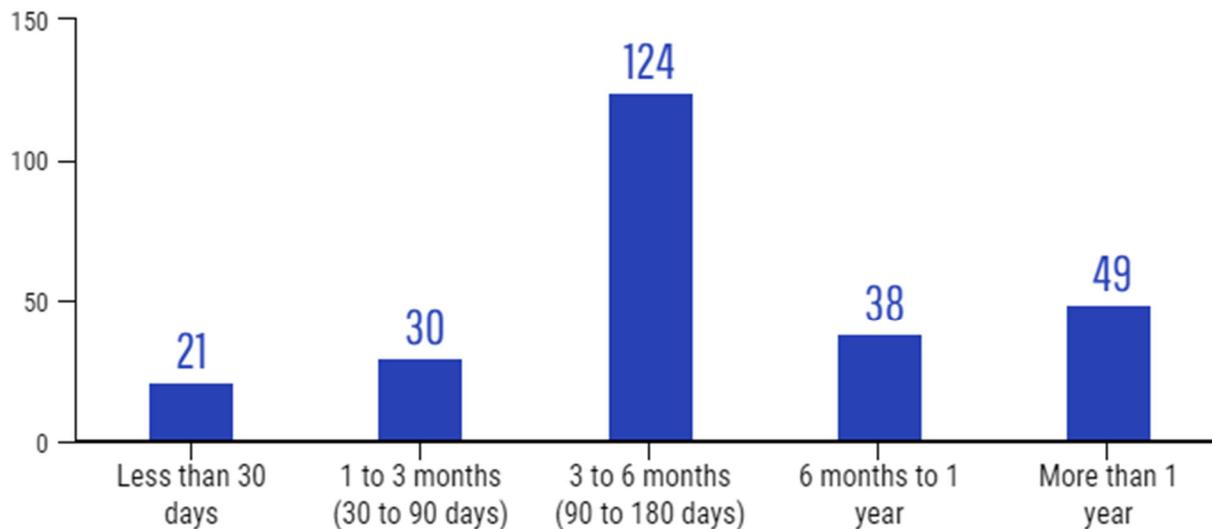
Those who did not have enough were asked how the lack of body cameras was handled by their agency: **46** indicated that officers exchanged cameras when switching shifts; **15** indicated that not every officer on duty uses a body camera; and **nine** entered text information under an “Other” category, which contained several reports of only specific portions of an agency’s personnel using body-worn cameras, while others shared them.



Next, agencies were asked about the existence and public availability of an official policy regarding their usage of body-worn cameras. **224** agencies (**82%**) indicated that they had a publicly available official policy, with another **26** having a policy not currently unavailable to the public, while **22** indicated that they did *not* have an official policy.

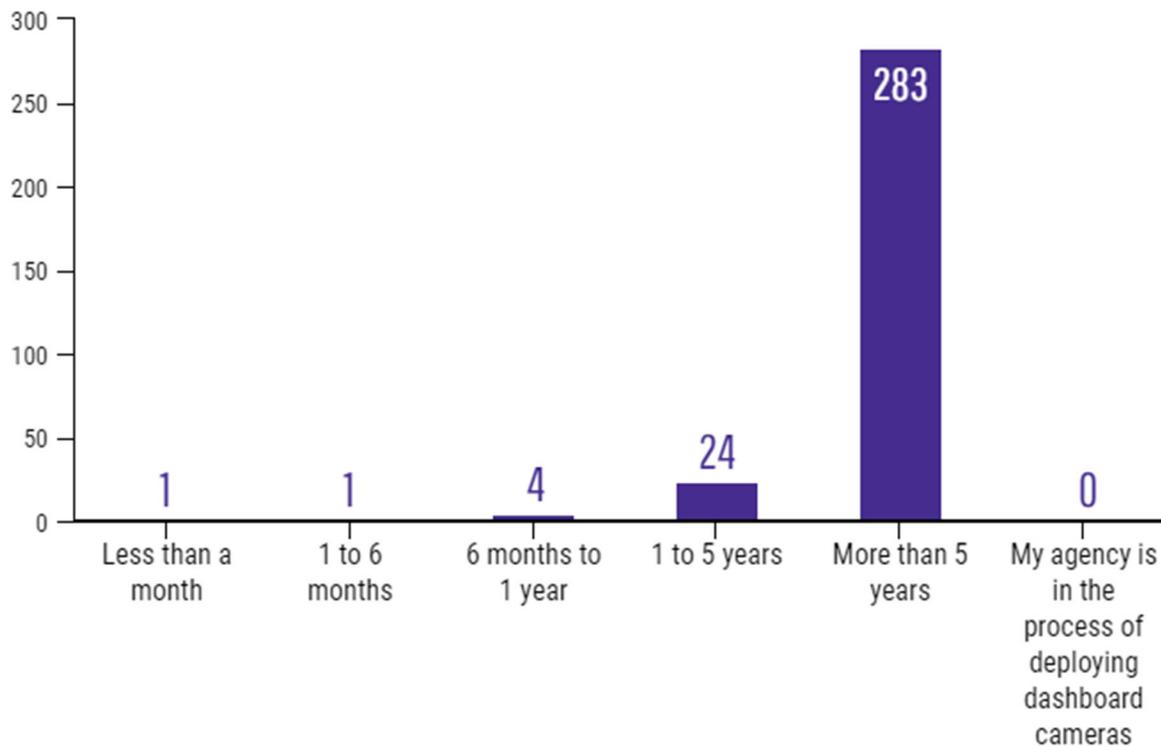
Finally, agencies were asked how long they preserved body-worn camera footage that is deemed unneeded due to irrelevance to criminal activity or court proceedings. **124** agencies (**45%**) indicated keeping footage for three to six months after its initial recording, with another **87** preserving footage for even longer. Only **51** agencies (**19%**) indicated keeping footage for three months or less.

How long does your agency preserve body camera footage that is deemed unneeded (e.g. no evidence of a crime, no footage relevant to traffic citations, etc.)?



Dashboard Cameras

How long has your agency been using dashboard cameras within patrol cars?



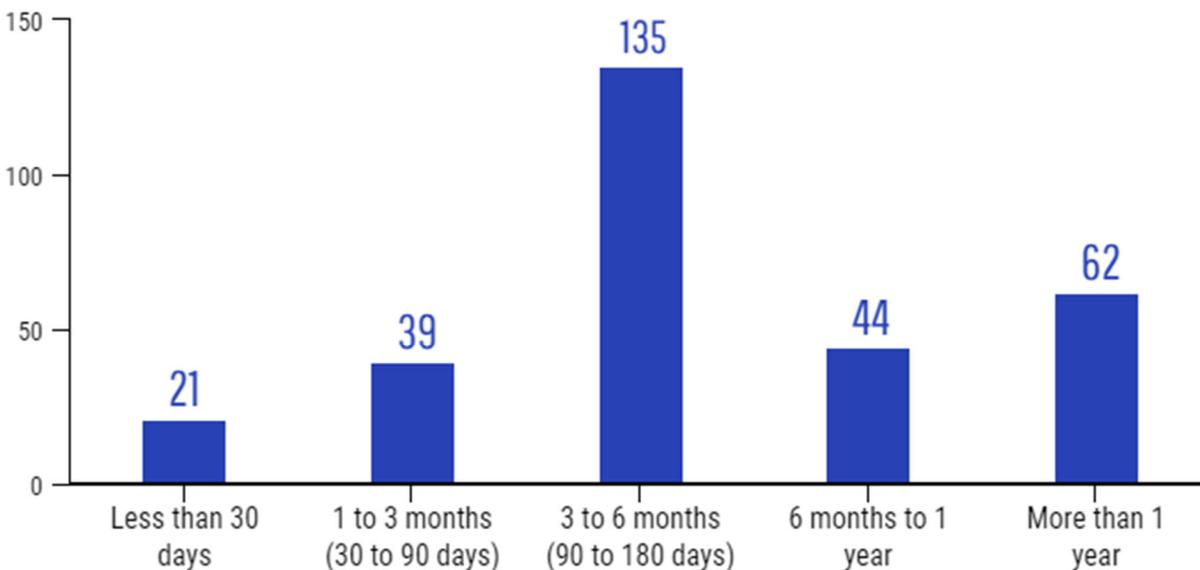
There were **316** agencies who confirmed using dashboard cameras. Of those, **283** (or **90%**) indicated that they have been doing so for more than five years. **24** have had them in use for one to five years, and only **six** have been using dashboard cameras for less than one year. **Zero** agencies are in the process of deploying dashboard cameras.

Specific to the use of dashboard cameras, agencies were asked about the medium that their cameras recorded – video *and* audio, or video only. **296** agencies (**94%**) indicated that both video *and* audio was captured by their dashboard cameras, with **20** indicating that only video was recorded on their devices.

In regard to policy, **252** agencies (**80%**) indicated having a publicly available official policy on their use of dashboard cameras, with another **27** stating they have a policy that is *not* currently publicly available. **37** reported *not* having a policy concerning the use of dashboard cameras.



How long does your agency preserve dashboard camera footage that is deemed unneeded (e.g. no evidence of a crime, no footage relevant to traffic citations, etc.)?



Dashboard camera footage preservation trends are similar to the body-worn camera trends, with **135** agencies (**43%**) keeping footage for three to six months, and another **106** agencies (**34%**) preserving footage for even longer. Only **60** agencies (**19%**) keep their unneeded dashboard camera footage for three months or less.

Challenges to Full Implementation

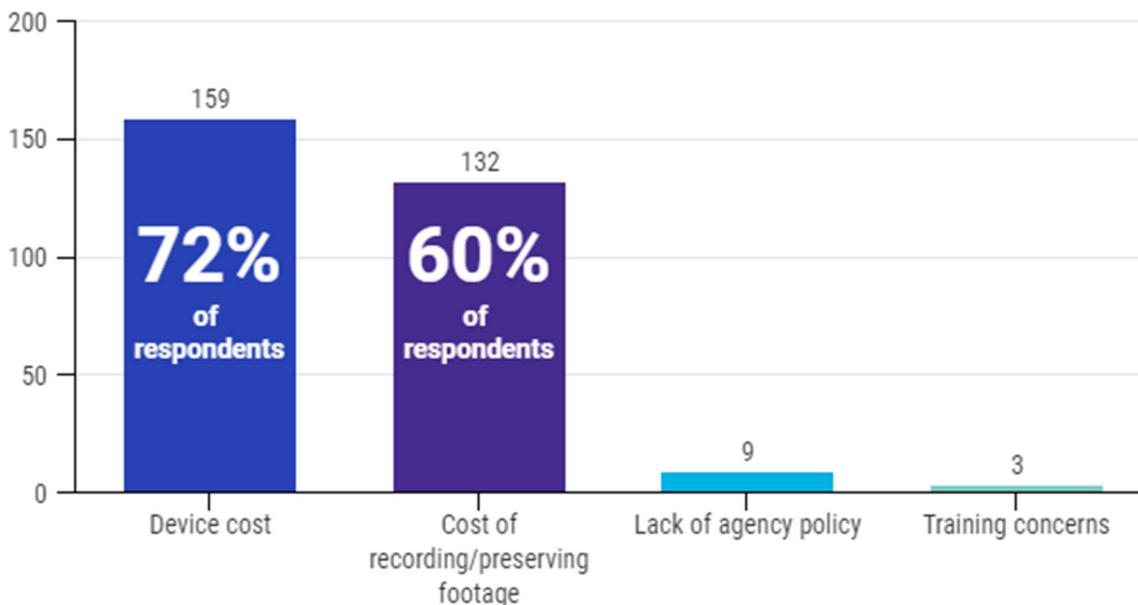
If agencies indicated that they used both body-worn and dashboard cameras but did not have enough body-worn cameras for every officer, or indicated that they only used *one* of the two recording device options, they were asked to identify any challenges that were preventing them from fully implementing both forms of recording device.

There were five options for selection (more than one option could be selected): training concerns; lack of agency policy regarding recording devices; device cost; cost of recording/preserving footage; and “Other”, with the ability to manually input any challenges that did not fit into the above categories if selected.

220 agencies fit the above criteria, and their responses are as follows:

- Device cost: **159** agencies (**72%** of respondents)
- Cost of recording/preserving footage: **132** agencies (**60%** of respondents)
- Lack of agency policy regarding recording devices: **9** agencies
- Training concerns: **3** agencies
- Other: **43** agencies

Challenges Associated with Full Implementation of Recording Devices



Trends among “Other” answers include:

- Possible issues from county/village boards preventing the implementation of either form of recording device
- A general lack of funding and/or storage space to maintain footage preservation from both forms of recording device
- Seeing dashboard camera usage as redundant or ineffective with full implementation of body-worn cameras by officers
- Concerns in relation to the video redaction process, as well as staffing a position to do so

Additionally, agencies who indicated they only used *one* of the two recording device options were asked whether they had previously implemented and subsequently discontinued the use of the other recording device. Their responses below indicate that many agencies tend to substitute body-worn cameras for dashboard cameras.

- Previously used and have since discontinued the use of dashboard cameras: **35** (of 64 who *only* use body-worn cameras)
- Previously used and have since discontinued the use of body-worn cameras: **3** (of 106 who *only* use dashboard cameras)

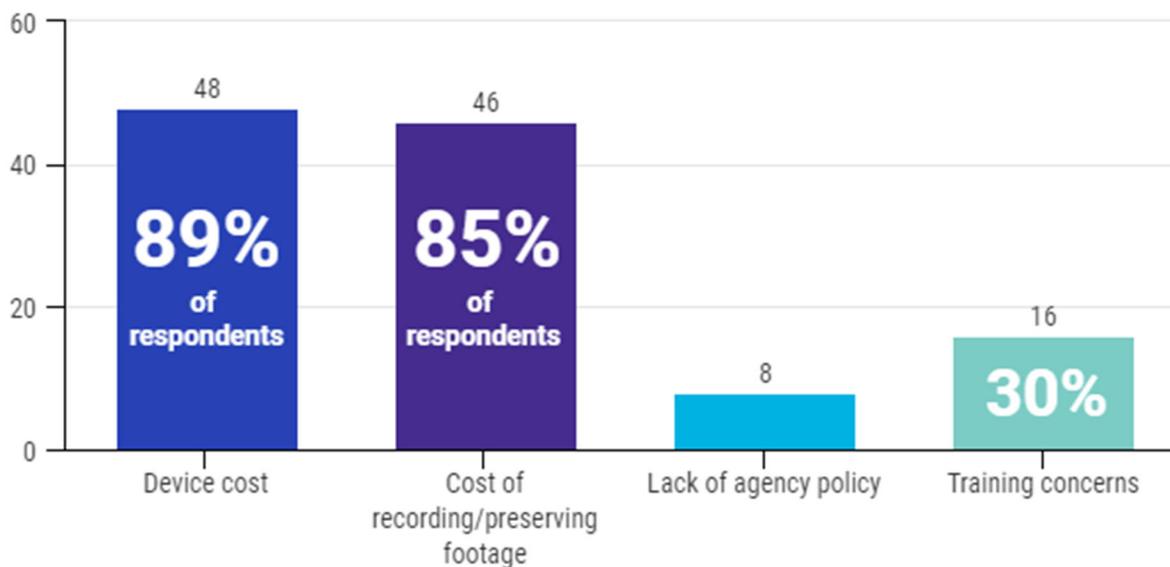


Challenges to Any Implementation

Like the agencies who did not indicate full implementation of recording devices, the 54 agencies who indicated not using *any* form of recording device were asked about the challenges that prevent them from doing so (more than one option could be selected):

- Device cost: **48** agencies (**89%** of respondents)
- Cost of recording/preserving footage: **46** agencies (**85%** of respondents)
- Training concerns: **16** agencies (**30%** of respondents)
- Lack of agency policy regarding recording devices: **8** agencies
- Other: **6** agencies

Challenges Associated with Any Implementation of Recording Devices



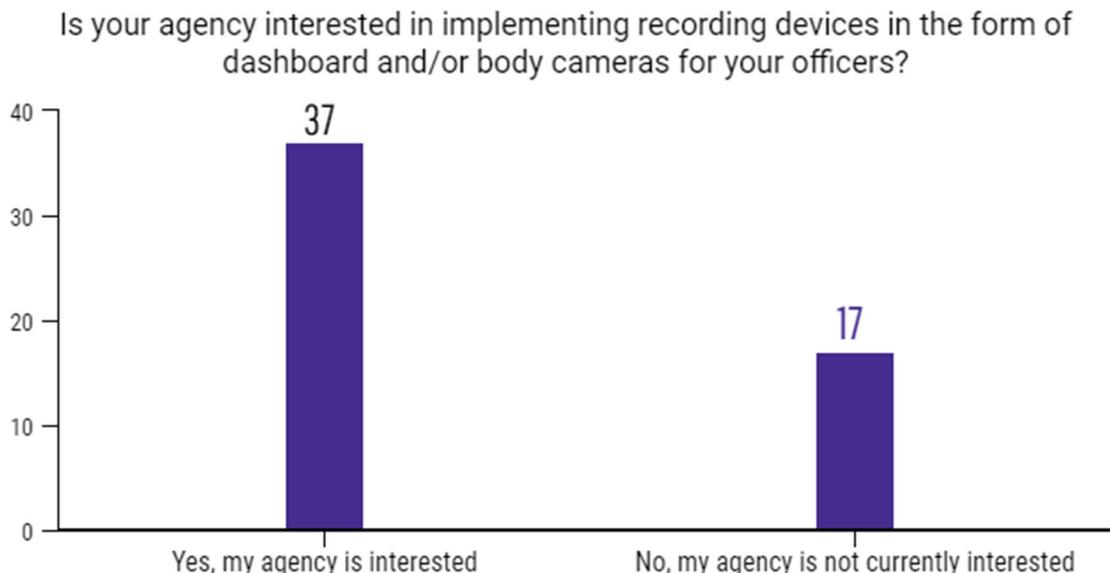
The responses for “Other” mainly include concerns over staffing a position to edit/redact video footage.

Additionally, these agencies were asked if they had ever previously used but have since discontinued the usage of any form of recording device:

- Have *never* previously used a recording device: **36**
- Previously used and have discontinued dashboard cameras: **13**
- Previously used and have discontinued *both* body-worn and dashboard cameras: **3**
- Previously used and have discontinued body-worn cameras: **2**



These agencies were finally asked if they were currently interested in implementing recording devices for their officers, and **37** of them (**66%**) indicated that they were.



Considering that device and video preservation cost are overwhelmingly identified as barriers to implementing recording devices, the budget variation of these 54 agencies is displayed below. **35** agencies (**65%**) have a budget of less than \$1 million and **14** have a budget between \$1 million and \$10 million, with the remaining **five** having a budget of \$10 million or more.

