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THE USE OF BODY-WORN CAMERAS IN THE PRISON SERVICE IN THE CONTEXT OF SOLUTIONS APPLIED BY THE POLICE

Abstract

This article outlines the use of body-worn cameras in the Prison Service in the context of legal solutions adopted by the largest user of such cameras—the Police. It highlights that the method of usage is insufficient if all interventions are to be fully transparent. Awareness among officers needs to be raised regarding the positive aspects of using body-worn cameras. Additionally, clear legal regulations are necessary concerning the obligation to turn on the cameras and the potential responsibility of officers for failing to record events.

Key words

body-worn cameras, new technologies in prisons, safety, legal regulations of using body-worn cameras.

Introduction

A body-worn camera is a device for recording both video and audio, worn on the uniform. In August 2017, the Central Board of the Prison Service announced that the Prison Service would begin testing modern video recording equipment¹. Such equipment has already been in use by uniformed services around the world for a long time, and considering the positive aspects of this technological solution, its introduction in Poland became necessary. At the end of 2016, over 200,000 body-worn cameras were used by uniformed services worldwide. Currently, the London police use 22,000 such cameras, the Los Angeles police use more than $75,000^2$, while the Polish Police have only 5,900 cameras³. The introduction of such devices requires legal regulations, selecting the appropriate equipment, and conducting training to ensure optimal and effective use. The use of body-worn cameras by both the Police and the Prison Service in Poland is problematic, as initial research into the subject literature indicates that the Polish legal system does not fully take into account the specifics of using modern observation and recording tools. Therefore, the research question formulated is: What are the legal conditions for using body-worn cameras in the Prison Service, considering the experiences gained from their use by the Police? The aim of this article is to explain the conditions of using body-worn cameras in the Prison Service, based on the experiences and conclusions drawn from their use by the Police.

In the research process, hermeneutics as a method of interpreting legal acts was not used directly, which is more commonly applied in legal commentaries. Instead, the method of analyzing the subject literature was employed, involving the selective selection of legal acts and developed interpretations of the law found in commentaries and monographs. As a result of reasoning (analysis, synthesis, abstraction, comparison, generalization), deductive inference was used in comparison to conclusions drawn from reality, based on the example of the Detention Center in Opole.

Police as the largest user of body-worn cameras

According to an announcement from the head of the Police in October 2021, by the end of 2023, at least one body-worn camera was supposed to be part of every police patrol's equipment.⁴ However, this did not happen. Nonetheless, the Police remain the largest user of body-worn cameras in Poland. The Police's authority to

¹ https://www.sw.gov.pl/aktualnosc/centralny-zarzad-sluzby-wieziennej-sluzba-wiezienna-przystepuje-do-testowania-nowoczesnego-sprzetu-video-rejestracji [dostęp: 17.09.2023].

² https://www.sw.gov.pl/aktualnosc/centralny-zarzad-sluzby-wieziennej-sluzba-wiezienna-przystepuje-do-testowania-nowoczesnego-sprzetu-video-rejestracji https://www.spyshop.pl/blog/kamery-nasobne-na-policyjnych-mundurach-zastosowanie-w-kontekscie-przepisow/ [access: 17.09.2023 r.].

³ https://www.spyshop.pl/blog/kamery-nasobne-na-policyjnych-mundurach-zastosowanie-w-kontekscie-przepisow/ [access: 17.09.2023 r.].

⁴ https://infosecurity24.pl/sluzby-mundurowe/policja/61-mln-zlotych-na-kamery-nasobne-dla-policjantow cess:17.09.2023 r.].

record interventions is granted not only by police service regulations but also by the regulation of the Council of Ministers from November 8, 2023, concerning the execution of certain police officers' powers, as well as by the guidelines of the Chief of Police⁵. The ability to use body-worn cameras by Police officers is granted under Article 15, Section 1, Points 5a and 5b of the Police Act, which differentiates the use of this equipment in public and private spaces⁶. Police officers conducting official duties have the right to observe and record events in public places using technical means, while in the case of operational and investigative activities and administrative-order actions based on the law, they may also record sound associated with these events⁷. Interestingly, the term "public place" is not defined in the law.

In a parliamentary draft of the act amending the Law on Sobriety Education and Counteracting Alcoholism and other laws (draft No. 1988, 8th term of the Sejm), it is stated that actions in a public place must take place in a space accessible to the public, where an unspecified number of people have unrestricted access, even if, at the time of the incident, only the offender is present (Constitutional Tribunal judgment of September 21, 2015, K 28/13 Legalis). Examples of public places include streets, squares, parks, shops, or public utility buildings (train stations, offices) — as stated in the Constitutional Tribunal's judgment of September 21, 2015 (K 28/13 Legalis)8. In another Constitutional Tribunal judgment dated February 12, 2015 (SK 70/13), it was indicated that a public place is "a place accessible to an unlimited circle of entities, even if, at the time of the incident, only the offender is present." It should be emphasized that the term "public place" does not have a clear interpretation⁹. Police authority regarding the use of body-worn cameras also extends to other places besides public ones. Thus, the Police have the right to observe and record images or sound during interventions in non-public places when conducting counter-terrorism operations and supporting Police organizational units in situations of particular danger, requiring the use of specialized forces, equipment, and tactics. Moreover, body-worn cameras are used in Police transportation vehicles¹⁰.

The authority provided under Article 15, Section 1, Point 5b of the Police Act cannot be used to bypass the requirements of operational control¹¹. The Police Act also regulates the storage of information obtained through observation and recording. Information gathered during observation and recording, as mentioned in Article

⁵ More: Regulation of the Council of Ministers of November 8, 2023 on the procedure for exercising certain powers of police officers, (Journal of Laws 2023, item 2535, consolidated text with later changes); J. Stankiewicz, *Kamery nasobne w Policji szansą na zwiększenie transparentności interwencji* [in:], *Nowe technologie. Wyzwania i perspektywy dla prawa karnego*, J. Piskorski, M. Błaszczak (ed.), Łódź, 2023, p. 54; J. Kupczyński, *Użytkowanie kamer nasobnych przez Policję i inne służby w świetle bieżących polskich regulacji prawnych*, "Kwartalnik Krajowej Szkoły Sądownictwa i Prokuratury" 2023, Zeszyt 3 (51), pp. 67-81.

⁶ See: Act of April 6, 1990 on the Police, (Journal of Laws 2024, item 145 consolidated text with later changes).

⁷ Ibid, art. 15 ust. 1 pkt 5a.

⁸ G. Krawiec, Ustawa o wychowaniu w trzeźwości i przeciwdziałaniu alkoholizmowi. Komentarz, Warszawa 2021.

⁹ See: M. Słomka, *Media społecznościowe jako miejsce publiczne*, "Czasopismo Prawa Karnego i Nauk Penalnych" 2019, Rok XXIII, Zeszyt 2 /2019.

¹⁰ See: Act of April 6, 1990 on the Police..., art. 15 ust. 1 pkt 5b.

¹¹ More: Ustawa o Policji. Komentarz, K. Chałubińska-Jentkiewicz, J. Kurek (ed.), Warszawa 2021.

15, Section 1, Points 5a and 5b, including personal data not providing evidence for initiating criminal, misdemeanor, or disciplinary proceedings or not useful for explanatory proceedings, must be stored by the Police for at least 30 days but no more than 60 days from the date of recording¹². Afterward, the information is destroyed. In cases mentioned in Article 15, Section 1, Point 5b, excluding counter-terrorism actions and support for Police units, officers should, when possible, inform individuals being recorded that the recording is taking place¹³. This notification serves as a safeguard for the rights of individuals, though the phrase "when possible" indicates that this notification is optional, not mandatory¹⁴.

The regulation concerning the execution of certain powers of police officers outlines in detail the procedures for observing and recording images and sounds in public places. While performing official duties, police officers may exercise their authority to observe and record images or sounds in the following ways:

- directly: in the case of the physical presence of police officers at the location of observation and recording of events,
- remotely: using telecommunication devices that transmit images or sounds of events over a distance, either openly or through methods that prevent unauthorized persons from determining the fact of observation and recording¹⁵.

The officer documents the service activities either in written or electronic form, depending on the circumstances and the results of the observation, as well as according to the instructions of the authorized entity deciding on the observation. They must specify the location and time of commencement and termination, as well as the types of technical means used¹⁶.

Despite preparations to implement and use body-worn cameras in the Police, many problems are noted regarding their proper use. The Secretary of State at the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration, Jarosław Zieliński, in response to interpellation No. 23161 concerning police actions in the Łódź Voivodeship, indicated that, by decision of the Chief of Police on December 7, 2017, a team was established to monitor the implementation of the Audio-Video Recording System (RAW) in the Police. This team was tasked with monitoring the system's deployment, collecting and analyzing data concerning the number of services using cameras, camera malfunctions, system reliability, server memory usage, marked data, and the number of shared recordings, as well as the advantages and disadvantages of the system. Instructions for using the body-worn camera of the RAW System and instructions for operating the RAW System were developed. According to these internal documents, police officers equipped with body-worn cameras are required to record interventions in public places and inform the individuals involved that they are being

16 Ibid, §16.

¹² See: Act of April 6, 1990 on the Police..., art. 15 ust. 1 pkt 5b.

¹³ Ibid, art. 15c.

¹⁴ More: A. Choromańska, P. Łabuz, I. Malinowska and others, Ustawa o Policji. Komentarz, Warszawa 2022.

¹⁵ See: Rozporządzenie Rady Ministrów z dnia 8 listopada 2023 r. w sprawie postępowania przy wykonywaniu niektórych uprawnień policjantów (Dz.U. poz. 2535), § 15.

recorded¹⁷. Thus, the recording obligation for police officers stems from an internal document, the instructions, rather than from service regulations, ministerial orders, or even an internal order such as a regulation from the Chief of Police. In various units, these instructions were either incorporated into the system of internal legal acts or separately regulated by a registration requirement for interventions. In some Police units, the RAW instruction was included in the system of internal legal acts, such as in the case of the Municipal Police Headquarters in Wrocław, while other Police units attached the RAW instruction as an appendix to a decision.

Given the significance of the issue and the importance of camera recordings as evidence, it can be argued that the rules for handling body-worn cameras should be regulated by law and not merely by instructions. The primary purpose of body-worn cameras is transparency; if officers are allowed to decide when to start recording during an intervention, they become privileged over the citizen involved in the intervention. Furthermore, apart from technical failures, in situations requiring mandatory recording, the lack of recording may lead to disciplinary accountability for officers. Police officers are obligated to perform their duties according to the law, and while instructions are an expression of their superior's authority, failure to comply carries consequences for the officer. However, to ensure legal certainty, this issue should be uniformly regulated by an act of law applicable to all officers.

Prison Service as a User of Body-Worn Cameras

The Police, as a uniformed formation, heavily rely on new technologies, including body-worn cameras. Similarly, in 2018, the Prison Service began testing body-worn cameras in selected penitentiary units, attached to uniforms, to increase the safety and comfort of officers, including Intervention Groups¹⁸. The Prison Service Act, in the section concerning the competencies of officers, lacked legal provisions for the use of body-worn cameras, as provided in the Police Act. Only with the addition of a chapter dedicated to the Internal Inspection of the Prison Service (IWSW), which grants the right to observe and record using technical means, was the use of such cameras legally recognized¹⁹. Officers of the IWSW, while performing their duties, are authorized to observe and record images and sounds in public places during operational and investigative activities²⁰.

An IWSW officer, during his official duties, exercises the authority to observe and record the image or sound of events in the following manner:

 direct – in the case of presence at the place of observation and recording of images or sounds of events,

¹⁷ https://www.sejm.gov.pl/sejm8.nsf/InterpelacjaTresc.xsp?key=B49HKU [access: 16.09.2024 r.].

¹⁸ https://www.special-ops.pl/artykul/wydarzenia-1/55372,sluzba-wiezienna-testuje-wideo-rejestratory-1 [access: 14.07.2024].

¹⁹ See: Act of April 9, 2010, on the Prison Service (Journal of Laws 2023, item 1683, consolidated text with later changes), rozdział 3a.

²⁰ Ibid, art. 23d ust. 1 pkt 4.

- remote using ICT devices transmitting the image or sound of events at a distance,
- open or using methods that make it impossible for unauthorized persons to establish the fact that observation and registration are being carried out²¹.

These officers perform their duties in a manner identical to the provisions outlined in the Police Act. The recorded images and sounds are stored on an IT data carrier, and copies are made in a manner that ensures confidentiality, integrity, and protection from loss or destruction, with a register maintained of the recordings and their copies²². These provisions are similar to those in the Police Act, but they only apply to IWSW officers, as other Prison Service officers do not have such defined powers. Therefore, in the subject literature, a legal conclusion has been drawn that the Prison Service lacks the authority to use body-worn cameras, with the note that the Penal Execution Code provisions only cover stationary systems²³.

Prisons can be monitored using internal systems of devices recording images or sounds, including $CCTV^{24}$. Monitoring allows for the observation of inmates' behavior, which can be implemented in residential cells, along with areas designated for hygiene and sanitation purposes, showers, visiting rooms, workplaces, communication areas, courtyards, and even the external perimeter of prison facilities²⁵. It is the provisions of the Penal Execution Code that provide the legal basis for Prison Service officers to use body-worn cameras. The Penal Execution Code also outlines the procedures for handling recorded images or sounds, specifying that materials that do not contain evidence of a crime or are irrelevant to the security of the penitentiary unit or the inmate must be immediately destroyed. If the images or sounds are significant for the security of the prison or the inmate, the prison director decides on the storage and use of such recordings²⁶. Such a decision is not considered an administrative decision under Article 7 § 1 of the Penal Execution Code and, therefore, cannot be appealed, as it does not affect the rights or obligations of the inmate²⁷.

The Minister of Justice was granted the authority to define, through regulation, the types of devices and technical means used for transmitting, reproducing, and recording images or sounds from monitoring in prisons, as well as the method for storing, reproducing, and destroying recordings, and for providing access to them to authorized entities, with the goal of properly securing the recorded images or sounds against loss, distortion, or unauthorized disclosure. It is in the Minister of Justice's regulation regarding the types of devices and technical means for monitoring in

²¹ Ibid.

²² See: J. Kupczyński, Użytkowanie kamer nasobnych przez policję i inne służby..., p. 77.

²³ See: Act of June 6, 1997, Executive Criminal Code (Journal of Laws 2024, item 706 consolidated text with later changes), art. 73a § 1.

²⁴ Ibid, art. 73a § 2.

²⁵ Ibid, art. 73a § 6-7.

²⁶ More: Kodeks karny wykonawczy. Komentarz. Wyd. 5, J. Lachowski (ed.), Warszawa 2023.

²⁷ Regulation of the Minister of Justice of October 16 on the types of devices and technical means used for transmitting, reproducing and recording image or sound from monitoring in prisons, (Journal of Laws 2009, item 175, position 2535 consolidated text with later changes), \$ 2 ust. 2 pkt 4.

prisons that one should look for more precise regulations giving competence to use body-worn cameras by Prison Service officers.

The equipment of the CCTV system includes:

- camera points, sets containing a camera with a lens and necessary auxiliary equipment, mounted depending on needs, with protective enclosures to prevent mechanical or environmental damage,
- control and transmission devices, wired and wireless multiplexers, image splitters, microphones, cabling, and transmission and receiving devices,
- monitors and devices for processing video signals into images displayed on screens,
- recording devices, audio tape recorders and digital recorders²⁸.

A body-worn camera is classified in the regulation as a device for recording images or sounds, equivalent to tape recorders or digital recorders²⁹. Access to devices that record images or sounds is controlled and available only to authorized persons³⁰.

A letter dated July 4, 2023, from the Deputy Director-General of the Prison Service, emphasized the need for transparency in the actions of Prison Service officers in their interactions with individuals deprived of liberty. It instructed that bodyworn cameras be provided to:

- shift commanders and their deputies if they perform duties outside of the guardroom,
- shift commanders or deputies in the absence of commanders on duty in external units³¹.

Additionally, units were instructed to develop internal regulations concerning the principles of using and maintaining body-worn cameras in proper technical condition. This resulted in the creation of an internal directive at the Detention Center in Opole. Supervisors also ordered that every use of a body-worn camera must be documented through an official note indicating the time, place, and circumstances of the device's use³². On July 12, 2023, the director of the Detention Center in Opole issued Directive No. 8/2023, which established procedures for shift commanders' use of body-worn cameras during service duties at the Detention Center in Opole and its external units³³.

The directive specified that body-worn cameras are mandatory equipment for shift commanders and their deputies in external units, and that upon assuming duty, the user should check the technical condition of the camera, verify the settings, and

32 Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid, § 2 ust. 2 pkt 4.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid, § 2 ust. 3.

³¹ See: Pismo Zastępcy Dyrektora Generalnego Służby Więziennej z dnia 4 lipca 2023 r., BO.560.1.2023.PJ.

³³ Instrukcja nr 8/2023 Dyrektora Aresztu Śledczego w Opolu z dnia 12 lipca 2023 r. w sprawie procedur użytkowania przez dowódców zmian kamer nasobnych w trakcie wykonywania czynności służbowych w Areszcie Śledczym w Opolu oraz w Oddziale Zewnętrznym w Opolu Aresztu Śledczego w Opolu oraz w Oddziale Zewnętrznym w Turawie Aresztu Śledczego w Opolu.

ensure the battery is charged³⁴. The directive also stated that the camera should be used particularly in the following cases:

- the necessity of using direct coercive measures,
- events specified in Appendix No. 1 of the list of events in Regulation No. 100/22 of the Director-General of the Prison Service, dated December 29, 2022, regarding the organization of the duty service in organizational units of the Prison Service, including the procedure for reporting events occurring in the Prison Service, and the procedures for conducting verification activities related to those events and documenting them,
- interactions with inmates related to complaints, doubts, or violations of order and discipline within the unit,
- in cases that raise concerns regarding the behavior of inmates,
- in situations threatening or violating the order or security of the unit,
- based on preventive recommendations or instructions from superiors,
- when the shift commander or their superior deems it appropriate.³⁵

The stipulation that the shift commander or their superior deems it appropriate means that something is considered necessary or desirable for someone to do. This formulation is advantageous because it is clear and refers solely to someone's duties³⁶, in this case, the shift commander's duties. Therefore, it can be concluded that in the aforementioned situations, there is an obligation to take specific actions, such as activating the body-worn camera. The directive's provisions state that the camera should be turned on before the intervention unless the situation's dynamics prevent it, in which case the user should activate it as soon as possible when circumstances allow³⁷.

It should be noted that failure to turn on the camera, in the context of the obligation to do so, could result in disciplinary responsibility for users. This raises the question of whether the consequences for not performing this task should be defined by instruction or by universally binding law. As is the case with the Police, this matter is not clearly defined.

Body-worn cameras can be mounted using clips on tactical vests, uniforms, belts, or shirts. The camera records in HD quality with a 142-degree field of view in various weather conditions, including extreme temperatures ranging from -20°C to +50°C, and can operate in low-light settings. The camera is resistant to water (submersion up to 1 meter), shock (withstands a drop from 1.8 meters), corrosion, and dust. The recording time is up to 70 hours, depending on the level of video compression³⁸. Currently, the Prison Service has 5 body-worn cameras in its inventory.

³⁴ Ibid, § 3 i 4 ust. 1.

³⁵ Ibid, § 5.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid, §8.

³⁸ https://ochrona-bezpieczenstwo.pl/ochrona-informacji/prawo/2073-psychospoleczne-i-ochronne-aspekty-stosowania-kamer-noszonych-przez-funkcjonariuszy-sluzby-wieziennej [access: 15.09.2024 r.].

At the Detention Center in Opole, body-worn cameras are issued to the shift commander and their deputy during service. In the subordinate external units, specifically the External Unit in Opole and the External Unit in Turawa, the deputies to the shift commanders are equipped with body-worn cameras, due to the lack of a shift commander position. Additionally, one extra body-worn camera is kept in reserve at the Detention Center in Opole in case of equipment failure.

Summary

The Prison Service, as a formation, must continuously evolve and adapt to the changing realities of the external world. Technological advancements can undoubtedly make the service easier and safer. Footage from body-worn cameras serves as an important source of evidence, particularly in cases involving assaults on officers or insults directed at them, but also in situations where the officers' professionalism is questioned. A camera is an impartial witness, helping to properly assess situations that may be contentious. Cameras can also help de-escalate emotions on both sides both the person being recorded and the person doing the recording. Individuals subject to intervention are aware from the start that the officer is collecting evidence, which often results in reduced aggression and better compliance with commands. In court proceedings involving insults or active assaults against officers, such footage is crucial evidence, alongside witness statements, to accurately portray events.

On the other hand, the use of cameras by superiors to verify the proper execution of duties could raise justified concerns about whether they might be used against officers. Body-worn cameras may give rise to a feeling of constant surveillance and excessive control by superiors. The Main Board of the National Union of Prison Officers (NSZZFiPW) holds the position that continuous monitoring of officers during duty unnecessarily increases stress and causes officers to subconsciously pay more attention to their behavior, gestures, and words, thus lowering their concentration on their official duties39. On the other hand, it could be expected that a highly professional officer should not fear scrutiny since their conduct should always adhere to regulations. Given these concerns, it is worth considering whether bodyworn cameras should be introduced for all officers, particularly those working in residential units. Whether body-worn cameras meet expectations depends on ensuring appropriate and regular training on device operation and creating operational procedures that do not lead to the misuse of recorded material against officers. Naturally, unethical, unprofessional, or illegal behavior by officers should be condemned and eliminated, but body-worn cameras should not become a tool for abuse by employers or lead to cautious actions by officers.

Union representatives (NSZZFiPW) have pointed out that, in extreme cases, recordings—especially audio recordings—have been used by superiors for punitive

³⁹ Pismo Niezależnego Samorządnego Związku Zawodowego Funkcjonariuszy i Pracowników Więziennictwa z dnia 14 lutego 2024 r., 1.dz. ZG/34/2024.

purposes against officers and employees under surveillance. Currently, body-worn cameras are used in the Prison Service to a limited extent. To introduce them on a broader scale, the procedures for their use should be standardized across all penitentiary units, and accountability should be clearly defined for failure to record, failure to charge batteries, or improper camera placement that prevents effective recording. There are no regulations covering what happens when a recording is missing due to equipment malfunctions or who is responsible for determining whether the failure was due to a device malfunction, lack of proficiency in using the camera, or deliberate action to hide illegal behavior. There is also a need to regulate whether such equipment should be assessed by the IT service in the unit or by a professional service provider, which would incur additional costs. Without uniform legal regulations on the use and maintenance of cameras in good working order, it will be difficult to say that body-worn cameras in the Prison Service meet the expectations placed upon them.

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