



128 Dorrance Street, Suite 400  
Providence, RI 02903  
Phone: (401) 831-7171  
Fax: (401) 831-7175  
[www.riaclu.org](http://www.riaclu.org)  
[info@riaclu.org](mailto:info@riaclu.org)

July 14, 2025

The Honorable Peter Neronha  
Attorney General  
150 South Main Street  
Providence, RI 02903

VIA EMAIL AND MAIL

Dear Attorney General Neronha:

I am writing in response to the highly publicized shooting of Sebastian Yidana — a mentally disabled man who had been waving a toy gun in public — by a Pawtucket police officer on June 8th. Like any police shooting, it has been the subject of a great deal of attention. That attention has been amplified at least in part by a lack of public transparency from the Pawtucket Police Department and ambiguous comments made by City officials about the incident. We therefore believe your intervention is necessary to address some of the confusion that still exists.

Specifically, for the reasons explained in more detail below, we request that you immediately release all of the body worn camera (BWC) footage from that incident which you have directly obtained pursuant to your office's "Protocol Regarding the Review of Incidents Involving the Use of Deadly Force, Excessive Force, and Custodial Deaths." Assuming that those recordings contain no more than what the police department has already released to the public, we also ask that you investigate the reasons why additional BWC footage is not available. Finally, we ask that you address the Pawtucket Police Department's non-compliance with its policies governing use of force incidents and the impact of that non-compliance on your office's ability to conduct a thorough and accurate review of this incident.

### **Release of Body Camera Footage**

In the past few years, we have seen other police departments respond within a matter of days in releasing BWC footage of police shootings. In the present instance, however, the Pawtucket Police Department did not release any recordings until three weeks had passed. Just as troubling, it remains unclear to this day whether all the available BWC footage has been released; hence our request that you release all the recordings that you have received as part of your investigation.

The confusion on this issue arises from both the limited scope of the footage that has been released and the comments made by city officials about it. The recordings that have been disclosed document only what happened *after* the shooting had already taken place, even though, under departmental policy, officer Thomas Letourneau should have activated his camera long before he shot Mr. Yidana.

Since more than a month has passed since the incident, we were prepared last week to demand the release of all remaining BWC footage.<sup>1</sup> However, in a recent news article, Police Chief Tina Goncalves clearly implies that there is no other footage beyond what was released to the media at the beginning of this month.<sup>2</sup> If so, this raises questions beyond the officer's apparent failure to comply with the activation policy:

- Chief Goncalves has stated that BWC footage of the shooting doesn't exist because officer Letourneau had failed to activate his camera, which was in "off-duty mode." But if that was the case, the shooting should nonetheless have been captured on video since the department's BWC system is specifically set up to *automatically* activate when "a BWC Officer's firearm is removed from its holster."<sup>3</sup>

- In addition, the department's BWCs are equipped with "pre-event buffering capabilities that automatically save thirty (30) seconds of footage prior to the officer activating a BWC."<sup>4</sup> It is our understanding that this pre-event footage provides only video, not audio, playback. Yet the recording of officer Letourneau's BWC begins with both audio and video playing.<sup>5</sup>

We therefore trust you can appreciate why we and others believe that questions remain about the limited video that has been released. These questions cannot be shunted aside as "pushing conspiracies," as Chief Goncalves has suggested.<sup>6</sup> It is in light of these questions and discrepancies that we believe it is critical that your office release all the footage

---

<sup>1</sup> We are now doing so through this letter. As you know, the Department of Public Safety's "Rules and Regulations Establishing Statewide Policy for the Use and Operation of Body-Worn Cameras" establish detailed provisions governing public access to BWC footage under circumstances involving police use of force. The regulations provide for the release of footage "no later than upon the substantial completion of the investigation, as determined by the Attorney General," which "is expected to occur within thirty (30) days."

<sup>2</sup> "Conflicting views on what officer says on body cam," Ethan Shorey, *The Valley Breeze*, July 9, 2025, [https://www.valleybreeze.com/news/conflicting-views-on-what-officer-said-on-body-cam/article\\_64ba08d2-1988-42c3-a188-e89197935d71.html](https://www.valleybreeze.com/news/conflicting-views-on-what-officer-said-on-body-cam/article_64ba08d2-1988-42c3-a188-e89197935d71.html).

<sup>3</sup> Pawtucket Police Department "Body Worn Camera" Policy, #440.33, Section 3.4(B)(4). [https://pawtucketpolice.com/documents/Body\\_Worn\\_Cam\\_2023.pdf](https://pawtucketpolice.com/documents/Body_Worn_Cam_2023.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Pawtucket Police Department "Body Worn Camera" Policy, #440.33, Section 3.1(A)(3). [https://pawtucketpolice.com/documents/Body\\_Worn\\_Cam\\_2023.pdf](https://pawtucketpolice.com/documents/Body_Worn_Cam_2023.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> We also believe that officer Letourneau can be heard on his recording exclaiming in frustration: "Oh, my body cam was on!" followed by a curse at around 2:49 of the recording. However, Chief Goncalves has asserted that the recording captures him saying that his body camera *wasn't* on. <https://bloximages.newyork1.vip.townnews.com/valleybreeze.com/content/tncms/assets/v3/editorial/b/31/b3161512-3a69-4e20-be60-4f6107e9977e/686ddb1d0177d.video.mp4>. In either event, the questions above remain.

<sup>6</sup> "Conflicting views," see fn. 2.

that you have obtained, while also seeking to determine how the shooting was not captured by the officer's BWC, if that is in fact the case.

### **Failure to Enforce "Use of Force" Protocols**

Perhaps even more troubling than the non-release or absence of video of the shooting itself is the police department's seeming lack of concern that officer Letourneau failed to prepare, immediately following the shooting, a written statement of what transpired. Almost three weeks after the incident, the city "confirmed that Officer Thomas Letourneau did not prepare a narrative report for the incident in question."<sup>7</sup>

There appears to have been no effort by police officials to challenge this lapse, a lacuna that not only defies common sense but is in direct violation of departmental policy which explicitly provides that "an officer who has used force shall articulate in writing the force used and the facts, circumstances, reasons for the use of said force."<sup>8</sup> Indeed, rather than criticizing the failure of officer Letourneau to complete a timely statement or of any supervisory personnel to make sure one was filed, Chief Goncalves is quoted as instead simply noting that officer Letourneau "provided his statement to multi-jurisdictional investigators."<sup>9</sup> But this, of course, is very different from, and nowhere near as useful as, submitting a contemporaneous accounting of what occurred. The whole point of preparing a statement is undermined if it is not done while the incident is still fresh in the officer's mind. The absence of a concurrent statement from the officer directly involved in the shooting can only hinder a meaningful examination of the incident, and the lack of any timely supervisory follow-up to ensure that one got filed is even more disturbing.<sup>10</sup>

The lack of any filed statement is doubly troubling since, if officer Letourneau failed to activate his camera, he violated yet another important departmental standard which requires an officer in those circumstances to "document in the written report of the incident why a recording was not made..."<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> "I trust the cops': After being shot by police while holding a toy gun, a Pawtucket man forgives, but faces challenges," Amanda Milkovits, *Boston Globe*, June 26, 2025, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2025/06/26/metro/ri-pawtucket-police-shoot-sebastian-yidana-toy-gun-mentail-illness-hospital-interview/>

<sup>8</sup> Pawtucket Police Department "Use of Force" Policy, #400.03, Section (IV)(F)(8) <https://pawtucketpolice.com/documents/useofforce%20policy.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.valleybreeze.com/news/pawtucket-chief-says-officer-couldn-t-have-known-gun-was-a-toy-body-cam-footage/article\\_d503d292-cb08-4893-ad34-5259966df1ed.html](https://www.valleybreeze.com/news/pawtucket-chief-says-officer-couldn-t-have-known-gun-was-a-toy-body-cam-footage/article_d503d292-cb08-4893-ad34-5259966df1ed.html)

<sup>10</sup> We further note that as a police department "accredited" by the Rhode Island Police Accreditation Commission (RIPAC), the Pawtucket Police Department is required to follow RIPAC accreditation standards, which mandate as "time sensitive" the preparation of statements in "use of force" scenarios. RIPAC Accreditation Standards Manual, Section 2.14. <https://ripoliceaccred.net/wp-content/uploads/sites/251/2020/10/RIPAC-Accreditation-Standards-Manual.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Pawtucket Police Department "Body Worn Camera" Policy, #440.33, Section 3.1(C). [https://pawtucketpolice.com/documents/Body\\_Worn\\_Cam\\_2023.pdf](https://pawtucketpolice.com/documents/Body_Worn_Cam_2023.pdf)

The police department's nonchalant reaction to this serious violation of protocol is deeply alarming for another reason. We have not reviewed the most recent years, but in 2018, we examined data regarding police shootings in the state. At the time, there had been 14 incidents of deadly police shootings in Rhode Island in the preceding dozen years. Seven of those deaths — one-half — had been at the hands of the Pawtucket Police Department. One would expect that, of all police departments in the state, Pawtucket would be the one most concerned about ensuring strict compliance with all policies governing the discharge of weapons by its officers. It is unsettling to see that this is not the case.

As noted earlier, more than 30 days have elapsed since the incident, and there has certainly been a sufficient amount of time for the "substantial completion" of any investigation to warrant your release of all video of the incident, especially considering that Pawtucket's police chief felt confident enough to issue a verdict almost two weeks ago in support of the police officer's actions.<sup>12</sup> In short, any justification for withholding the public's access to any of this critical information has long since passed.

I know I don't need to emphasize to you the important goals of transparency and accountability that underlie the state law assisting police agencies with the purchase of BWCs and the DPS regulations implementing a policy to govern their use. As you noted at the time that law was enacted, the use of body worn cameras promotes police accountability and builds community trust. The questions surrounding the recordings from this shooting leave those goals frustrated.

In conclusion, this letter takes no position on whether the use of force against Mr. Yidana was justified. But we are extremely concerned about the way this shooting has been handled by the Pawtucket Police Department, and we believe your office should be too.

Therefore, while there may be Access to Public Record ACT (APRA) appeals pending before your office over the police department's response to requests for release of all the body camera footage and related documents, the public deserves immediate information at this point. We call upon you to exercise your independent authority, under both APRA and the DPS regulations, to immediately release all the recordings of this shooting that are in your agency's possession.<sup>13</sup> For all the other reasons expressed in this letter, we ask that you investigate the alleged absence of BWC footage of the shooting itself, and address the impact

---

<sup>12</sup> "Pawtucket chief says officer couldn't have known gun was a toy; body cam footage released," Ethan Shorey, *The Valley Breeze*, July 2, 2025. [https://www.valleybreeze.com/news/pawtucket-chief-says-officer-couldn-t-have-known-gun-was-a-toy-body-cam-footage/article\\_d503d292-cb08-4893-ad34-5259966df1ed.html](https://www.valleybreeze.com/news/pawtucket-chief-says-officer-couldn-t-have-known-gun-was-a-toy-body-cam-footage/article_d503d292-cb08-4893-ad34-5259966df1ed.html).

<sup>13</sup> While you have the authority to release this footage on your own initiative, please consider this a formal request pursuant to the Access to Public Records Act if you deem this formality necessary under the DPS regulations. However, in light of the strong public interest in this matter and the time that has already passed, we trust there is no need to wait a possible ten business days for you to release the recordings in your possession or for the resolution of any pending appeals relating to the Pawtucket Police Department's response to the requests *it* received.

of the Pawtucket Police Department's non-compliance with its policies governing use of force incidents on your office's ability to comprehensively review this incident.

Thank you in advance for your prompt attention to this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Steven Brown", with a stylized, flowing script.

Steven Brown  
Executive Director

cc: The Hon. Donald Grebien  
Chief Tina Goncalves  
Pawtucket City Council  
Kathryn Sabatini