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Using electronics in policing

Dear editor:

Given the recent media coverage on In-Car Cameras (ICCs), often referred to as ?Dash Cams,? I want to clarify some of the misinformation that was conveyed in relation to the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP).

In 2004, the OPP installed approximately 80 cameras in front-line police vehicles as part of a pilot project. The vehicles were deployed in the Greater Toronto Area, Ottawa and Kenora. The focus of the pilot was aimed at increasing the safety of our officers and the public, and the video could provide additional evidence with respect to criminal and Highway Traffic Act (HTA) investigations and prosecutions.

The pilot study ran for three years, ending in 2007. After the pilot was concluded and the evaluations were completed, the decision was made not to proceed with a province-wide deployment. The cameras remained in the vehicles while they were functional, with the last camera being removed in 2009. The OPP has not used ICCs since that time.

The OPP is committed to providing the most effective and efficient police service possible, as we were in 2007 when it was decided that the ICCs should not be implemented across the province.

More recently, the conversation has moved to Body Worn Cameras (BWCs). Similar to the challenges faced with ICCs, there are concerns beyond cost, including: data storage and management, technological shortcomings, privacy concerns, and a lack of existing regulations and case law regarding their use. The vast deployed nature of the OPP work force compounds the problems outlined above. In April 2015, the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police (OACP) endorsed the BWC pilot project being conducted by the Toronto Police Service (TPS) and police services across the province were asked to adopt an ?observe and hold? position on BWCs until that pilot project was complete. The OPP supports the OACP's position and will fully evaluate the TPS report when it is completed.

Over the past several years the OPP has made significant investment in technology that has had an impact on public and officer safety, in addition to creating efficiencies to keep officers on the road and in communities they serve. In 2016, the OPP will have every on-duty front-line officer equipped with a Conducted Energy Weapon. The OPP currently owns and operates eleven Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) to support investigations with photographs and videos in a timely and cost efficient manner. The use of UAVs in traffic collision investigations has significantly reduced the length of time highways are closed. The expansion of the number of Mobile Work Stations in vehicles, the implementation of Citizen Self-Reporting and the Civilian Data Entry program have all allowed for increased police visibility and provided an opportunity for officers to spend more time engaging in proactive enforcement and crime prevention activities.

The Ontario Provincial Police remains committed to leveraging technology to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of our police force; however, we must make informed decisions and weigh the costs of implementation against other strategic priorities.

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