

Governor Phil Murphy

Press Pool Coverage: Governor Murphy, Attorney General Grewal, and Lieutenant Governor Oliver Visit the Camden County Police Department to Mark First Day of Body-Worn Camera Mandate

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PRINT:

Projected on a floor-to-ceiling screen, the footage from a camera worn by a Camden County police officer began with a mental health crisis and ended with no serious injuries.

As New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy watched Tuesday morning, crowded into a room in the Camden department and flanked by local politicians, Attorney General Gurbir Grewal and other law enforcement officers, the scene unfolded from a recording taken by Camden Officer Anthony Alvarez's body camera. In it, Alvarez and other officers spoke calmly to a man who was suffering from schizophrenia, and who at one point brandished sticks at the officers.

Officers eventually fired a taser at him, had him taken to a hospital, and filed no charges - a "peaceful outcome," according to Camden Capt. Kevin Lutz, especially when considering a tripod that resembled a rifle that officers saw leaning against the wall of the man's basement bedroom.

"Very impressive," Murphy said, and shook hands with the officers as he toured the station.

Starting Tuesday, all New Jersey police departments will be required to equip their uniformed patrol officers with cameras. But the technology isn't new in Camden, where officers have worn cameras since 2016, and which Murphy visited to mark the first day of the new mandate.

The statewide law went into effect six months after Murphy signed legislation requiring the cameras. Murphy later appropriated \$58 million in grants that departments can apply for to pay for the equipment.

The footage taken last month and shown to Murphy Tuesday was viewed on the department's VirTra simulator, used to evaluate interactions between officers and residents. Lutz said they offer a way for officers to weigh what has gone wrong and right with such confrontations.

"It gives us something to look back on," he said. "Just like game-day footage."

The recordings also provide objective evidence for court cases, officials said.

Murphy, who met briefly with community leaders and local leaders at the department, said the law will bolster trust between officers and residents in departments around the state.

"It's good for law enforcement, it's good for the communities they serve, and it's good for New Jersey," he said.

Allison Steele

PHOTOS

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(https://www.dropbox.com/sh/wnx49epy7yzqu74/AABDxIsLalebP_-gO5Ov5IDka?dl=0)
Monica Herndon
The Philadelphia Inquirer

VIDEO

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Kenneth Burns, WHY?

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