

KS Senate approves bill on police body camera footage

TOPEKA, Kan. (AP) — Kansas legislators took a step Thursday toward greater transparency in law enforcement, with the Senate unanimously passing a bill that would require departments to share body camera footage more quickly.

The bill would give law enforcement agencies up to 20 days to release requested footage, fast-tracking a process that currently can take months. But the quicker access would be limited to the subjects of the footage, their attorneys, legal guardians or next of kin.

The House passed a version earlier this month but still must consider a small change made by senators before it can go to Republican Gov. Jeff Colyer. And despite the 40-0 vote in the Senate, the measure still faced some criticism.

Democratic Sen. Faust-Goudeau of Wichita said the legislation doesn't go far enough and is a "softer version" of what is needed. It still leaves police with too much discretion over determining policy on body camera use, she said.

Kansas law does not require officers to wear body cameras, though many departments do. Departments also set their own guidelines for when cameras should be turned on or off and how long the footage is preserved.

Faust-Goudeau said she wants a bill that would clearly define police procedures on recording equipment.

Democratic Rep. John Alcalá of Topeka authored the bill. He understands the criticism but is proud of the bill regardless, he said.

"We need to be reasonable in how we move forward knowing it's going to be a complete culture shock to law enforcement," Alcalá said.

Alcalá said rebuilding lost trust between his community and law enforcement is of primary concern. He said he felt Topeka was "on the edge of unrest" after two officers shot a 30-year-old man, Dominique White, outside a Topeka park in September. White's father was not able to view the body camera footage from the incident for nearly three months.

Alcalá could not get everything he wanted all at once but said he plans to revisit police transparency when legislators study various issues this summer.

The Senate also approved, 39-0, a bill designed to make law enforcement agencies more transparent about the property they seize from suspects. It would require

the Kansas Bureau of Investigation to compile data on what gets seized and to monitor whether reports from law enforcement agencies are accurate.

The House approved the same measure last month, and it goes next to Colyer.

Associated Press