



ZACH KLEIN
COLUMBUS CITY ATTORNEY

A Special Message from City Attorney Zach Klein

Dear Residents of Columbus:

I hope this correspondence finds you healthy and safe.

On September 17, 2020 I sent out a special edition of our newsletter that included a Q&A section to address false rumors and misunderstandings around city and police policy relating to combatting nonviolent crime in our neighborhoods. (In the event you missed that important message, you can find it [here](#).)

In that communication, we unequivocally stated that police have never been ordered to “stand down,” nor have police been told not to enforce laws that protect victims and property.

In Ohio, police officers have the authority to make an arrest. That decision rests solely with the officer, and no one else. As city attorney, I support officers in their efforts to arrest individuals who are committing violent crime and/or are chronic and repeat offenders.

Since writing my last email to you, my team and I heard from residents and police about whether the county jail would even accept individuals who were arrested for nonviolent crime. Specifically this centered on prostitution-related offenses.

We found this very concerning because – based on experience – the Division of Police and the City Attorney agree that arresting and setting bail is an effective way to engage certain victims of human trafficking with services to help them escape their exploiter. In fact, like many of you, I’ve attended [CATCH court](#) graduations where victims of human trafficking who were arrested for prostitution-related offenses explicitly stated that getting arrested and being provided resources in jail literally saved their lives.

In light of this concern, I coordinated a meeting between Columbus Police leadership, the Franklin County Sheriff’s office, Municipal Court Judge Paul Herbert (who runs the CATCH Court program) and the City Attorney’s Office. The purpose was to get everyone on the same page moving forward on how we can best deal with these issues.

At the outset, the Sheriff and his team stated that while they are trying to limit the jail population due to COVID-19, **the jail can and will still accept individuals who need to be there**. It was further clarified and agreed upon by all in attendance that **the jail will take certain individuals charged with prostitution-related offenses**. All parties agreed that not every individual engaged in prostitution-related offenses should be arrested; rather, a determination must be made whether the individual is in immediate or serious danger from their exploiter and/or the individual is amenable to detox and treatment.

The Sheriff did stress, however, that the jail has limited space due to COVID-19 restrictions. Thus, if the jail does become overcrowded, the Sheriff and his team would have to take further steps to control the

population, which would then be communicated to officers.

This was a very productive meeting, and I'm grateful for the participation by all involved.

Due to many factors, including a global pandemic, these are uncertain times. Now, more than ever, we must all work together, and this was a positive step in the right direction not only to improve the quality of life in our great city but also to align on how we can help victims of human trafficking.

We need more innovative solutions to help victims of human trafficking, including a secure facility, separate from jail, where individuals can be temporarily housed and receive services. I will continue to support and push for innovative solutions like this one and others so these crimes aren't occurring in our neighborhoods. Victims of human trafficking deserve a real shot at success and rehabilitation. Many of them are mothers, and there are few more uplifting and promising sights than seeing them reunited with their children in a healthy relationship.

I appreciate the community's feedback and continual engagement with me and my office about these safety-related issues. I will keep you posted on other issues that may arise that need attention.

Your and your family's safety is my number one priority. I'm confident that we can all work together to improve the quality of life in all of our neighborhoods while also seeking a more equitable and fair criminal justice system.

Best,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "JAMIE".