



# ZACH KLEIN

COLUMBUS CITY ATTORNEY

eNewsletter

Volume 2, Issue 1

## From the Desk of City Attorney Zach Klein

After having recently marked my first full year as City Attorney, it’s important to pause for a moment and reflect on where we’ve been in order to plot the course forward.

In looking back at some of the past year’s milestones, we hope this newsletter shines light on a few of our staff’s accomplishments and achievements working on behalf of the residents of Columbus.

Because we act as legal counsel for all of city government while also serving to protect the public interest, the work that our attorneys and support staff perform is oftentimes behind-the-scenes. I liken a lot of what we do to “preventative medicine”—we take a proactive approach through legal advice, counsel, training, and instructive videos to improve city practices and policies so that actions that could potentially result in litigation against the city are prevented from happening in the first place. These proactive efforts by our office are a critical part of our mission to keep our community safe.

Speaking of looking back, later in this issue, you can learn more about our efforts to prevent the further decay of a Franklinton landmark steeped in history. It’s disappointing to see iconic buildings in our city fall into such a state of disrepair that they become a true danger to the community. Unfortunately, that’s exactly what happened to Bellows Avenue Elementary School. We’re always looking to work with property owners to find ways to restore buildings like Bellows, but we also won’t allow properties to endanger our residents.

On a final note, I’d like to acknowledge two of our office’s alumni who recently took steps to further their dedication to public service—former [Zone Initiative](#) Attorneys Jaiza Page and Shayla Favor were sworn in as Judge of the Franklin County Court of Common Pleas and Member of Columbus City Council, respectively. You’ll be able to read about another rising star in our Zone team, Tiara Ross, who is not only following in the footsteps of Judge Page and Councilmember Favor in working with the community to promote safer neighborhoods, but she’s also honoring a proud family tradition of service to others in her own right.

Sincerely,

February 2019



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## Annual Review Reveals Priorities

When City Attorney Klein took the oath of office on January 1, 2018, becoming the 18th elected chief legal officer in city history, he pledged to challenge both himself and his staff to be “bold and creative” in how to use the full breadth of the office to better serve Columbus residents.

One of his first moves was creating the [City Solicitor General](#)’s office, a position designed to promote important public policy changes. He also established a Proactive Litigation Team to actively seek opportunities to protect the rights of Columbus residents. The [Zone Initiative Unit](#) continued to be aggressive in shutting down problem properties and holding bad landlords accountable. The ensuing results have already had an impact on the city:

- **New Gun Ordinances** – The City Attorney’s office led the way in drafting and helping enact a series of common sense gun laws, including a ban on bump stocks and prohibitions against domestic abusers and other violent criminals from possessing firearms. While the city ordinances were passed in May, the office continues to defend them in court against litigation brought by gun lobby groups.
- **Columbus Crew Lawsuit** – This important legal decision recently culminated in the announcement that the new owners of the Columbus Crew were committing to build a new stadium while also helping turn the old stadium site into a community sports park. The City Attorney’s joint lawsuit filed in conjunction with the Ohio Attorney General’s office, and the city’s subsequent motion to toll, or pause, the six-month negotiating period helped #SaveTheCrew from moving to Austin, Texas and paved the way for the deal to take shape.
- **ACA Lawsuit** – In August, the City of Columbus became the lead plaintiff in a suit against the Trump Administration for intentionally and unlawfully sabotaging the Affordable Care Act (ACA). The 130-page complaint asserts that in systematically attacking the ACA, President Trump is raising the cost of health coverage and increasing the number of uninsured Americans. The suit also outlines how these intentional actions violate the President’s lawful duty under the “Take Care Clause” of the U.S. Constitution.
- **U.S. Census Lawsuit** – Last May, Columbus joined the State of New York in a lawsuit to block the federal government from demanding citizenship information in the 2020 U.S. Census. City Attorney Klein explained at the time that Columbus was joining the lawsuit in part because of the decades of bipartisan recognition that demanding citizenship information would lead to greatly depressed census participation in communities with large immigrant populations, potentially threatening critical federal funds and fair representation in Congress and the Electoral College. In 2017, Columbus received nearly \$100 million in federal grant programs, many of which relied on the population figures collected in the census to distribute federal funds among states and local governments.

### *Looking Back, Moving Forward*

“During our first year, we focused on how to use the full breadth of this office to best advocate for our city, and I’m enthusiastic about the issues we’re going to tackle in 2019. From criminal justice reform to continuing our aggressive effort to clean up neighborhoods, we want to keep working on creative, collaborative solutions that help make lives better for all Columbus residents.”



**ZACH KLEIN**  
COLUMBUS CITY ATTORNEY



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- **Title X Funding Lawsuit** – City Attorney Klein led the effort to garner support from cities across the country to help bolster Planned Parenthood’s lawsuit to protect Title X funding. The City of Columbus, along with several other cities attached as signatories, filed an amicus brief in support of Planned Parenthood’s request for a federal injunction to keep funding that has long been used to expand access to contraceptive care and reproductive health care for low-income, uninsured, and underinsured individuals.

During his swearing-in ceremony last year, City Attorney Klein also committed to continue prioritizing neighborhood safety and looking for new ways to protect the most vulnerable members of our community.

The statistics from 2018 bear out these promises:

- 4419 domestic violence cases prosecuted and victim advocacy services provided to approximately 5500 victims.
- 410 code violation nuisance abatement cases filed.
- 109 properties referred to the city’s Vacant and Abandoned Property team for demolition.
- Dozens of criminal activity nuisance abatement lawsuits filed, shutting down 18 drug houses, two apartment buildings, and five carryouts due to violent crime, drug sales and illegal alcohol sales.
- Objected to four hotel/motel permits. Two were resolved with agreed orders and two were sold to new owners.
- A massage parlor that investigators claimed was a front for prostitution put out of business, as city attorneys used civil litigation to shut down a human trafficking operation for the first time ever.
- Settlement reached with AMG Realty Group, defendant in the largest public nuisance lawsuit in city history.
- Close to \$5 million brought into the General Fund through in-house and outside agency delinquent tax collections.
- \$2.8 million in new federal funding secured to help expand local opioid intervention programs.
- 800 drug deactivation bags secured and distributed to the public free-of-charge to encourage safe and responsible at-home drug disposal.
- Provided legal work to transfer 235 deeds to the City Land Bank.
- Provided legal advice, instrument preparation, and negotiating services for 339 land acquisitions related to future development projects.



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## Protecting History in Franklinton

The Bellows Avenue Elementary School is an iconic building in Franklinton that, contrary to popular belief, was not named after the famed early 20th Century painter and Columbus native, George Bellows, but rather his father, George Bellows, Sr. The elder Bellows was renowned in his own right as an architect and builder who resided in Columbus from 1849 until his passing in 1913. Unfortunately, the school that was named after him in 1905 and remained open until 1982 has fallen into such a state of disrepair that the City of Columbus sued the current owner, Yhetkel Levi, in the Franklin County Environmental Court last month.



The former Bellows Avenue Elementary School in Franklinton was named after George Bellows, Sr. His son and namesake was a famous American artist whose works have sold for tens of millions of dollars.

Due to the lawsuit, the City Attorney entered into a stipulated agreement to compel Mr. Levi to immediately begin repairing the once proud fixture of the Franklinton community that has been dangerously deteriorating for years. The agreed court order prohibits Mr. Levi from maintaining a public nuisance and requires him to immediately remedy all exterior issues and begin planning to fix the interior conditions that the city declared were “unsafe” and “dangerous to human life.”

Per the agreement, Levi has until April 29, 2019 to resolve all the exterior code violations. A hearing will be held before the court that day to determine compliance on that part of the agreement, while also setting a schedule for repairing the extensive interior damage.

Failure to adhere to the agreement could result in contempt of court proceedings.

The City Attorney’s original complaint, which was filed last October, cited Levi for failing to properly address a litany of code violations, some of which dated back to at least July 2016. The complaint indicated that the building suffered from “substantial structural failure and deterioration.”

According to court documents, some of the problems city inspectors found at the premises included:

- Significant portions of the roof, main interior ceilings, and floors had collapsed into the basement, creating “large voids” in the floor system.
- Remaining interior ceilings and floors were severely deteriorated and at risk of further collapse.
- Interior walls were deteriorated and collapsing.
- All mechanical systems had been damaged and compromised.
- Egress paths were inaccessible due to collapsed building materials and large holes in the floor.

## Meet the Staff

Having been a corporate attorney in the banking industry, Tiara Ross has worked with some of the largest private equity firms and hedge fund managers on Wall Street, and helped clients located in the ancient streets of Edinburgh, Scotland prepare for the potential regulatory ramifications of Brexit. But it was an inherent calling towards public service that beckoned Tiara back to her hometown and brought her to the Columbus City Attorney's [Zone Initiative Unit](#), where she now splits her time between the court room and the community, looking for ways to fix problems like drug houses, crime-plagued hotels, human trafficking, irresponsible businesses, code violators and negligent property owners.



### Tiara Ross

**Title:** Assistant City Attorney

**Education:** The Ohio State University Moritz College of Law, J.D.; The Ohio State University, B.A. in Psychology and Strategic Communications; Reynoldsburg High School.

Such an abrupt career change shouldn't come as a surprise to those who know Tiara, since the call to serve others is in her DNA—her grandfather is Bishop Jerome H. Ross, Sr., who is revered far and wide for his service to his congregation and the greater community as Senior Pastor of Triedstone Missionary Baptist Church for over 50 years. Among many achievements and awards, Bishop Ross was inducted into the Martin Luther King, Jr. Board of Preachers (also known as the Preachers' Hall of Fame) at Morehouse College in 1998.

While her grandfather began preaching as a young child and knew he was going to be not only a pastor but a bishop at a very early age, Tiara “waited” until her junior year in high school to hone in on a legal career. A thesis in law course led to the statewide moot court finals and from there Tiara's path was set. She matriculated to Ohio State, where she focused on areas of study that would help lay the foundation for her future law career, earning undergraduate degrees in Psychology and Strategic Communications. She next entered The Ohio State University Moritz College of Law and enjoyed back-to-back summer internships that gave her invaluable experience as a law student. In 2010, she served as a legal intern in Franklin County Prosecutor Ron O'Brien's office and the following year she got private practice exposure as a summer associate at the Weston Hurd law firm.

In 2012, Tiara received her law degree from OSU and it seems fitting that later that year, literally minutes after being sworn in as an attorney, Tiara had to breathlessly race across town to arrive in time to hear her grandmother sing the National Anthem before the President of the United States. It was the third president that her grandmother was honored to sing before and definitely a day that Tiara and her whole family will cherish forever.

Having achieved the goal she set out for herself back in high school, Tiara entered private practice and soon was hired by JPMorgan Chase to help bolster their compliance operations. She researched global typologies corresponding to high risk financial crime indicators, helping identify potential suspicious activities, and prepared investigative reports in compliance with federal anti-money laundering regulations. While this is critically important work, Tiara wanted more interaction with people instead of just numbers and large data sets, so she moved to a client-facing role at JPMorgan. She served in this capacity for three years, working with the bank's largest private equity and hedge fund clients, when she knew it was time to listen to her heart and head back home. Tiara knows there is no substitute for hard work, and she hit the ground running. She stresses that each case, and everyone's situation, is unique and requires a willingness to work towards lasting solutions to intractable problems. It's a way for her to give back to the community that has given her so much, **5** and helped make her the person she is today.



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Former Assistant City Attorney and Columbus City Councilmember Jaiza Page (far left) was sworn-in last month as Franklin County Common Pleas Judge by her retired predecessor, the Hon. Judge Guy L. Reece, II.



Former Assistant City Attorney Shayla Favor being sworn in as the newest member of Columbus City Council on January 25, 2019. City Attorney Klein was honored to serve as master of ceremonies.



*Deaf World Against Violence Everywhere (DWAVE) and several Franklin County Victim Witness Advocates joined our Domestic Violence & Stalking Unit recently to talk about the many barriers deaf victims face when they attempt to access mainstream agencies. Our office plans more partnering in 2019, including community forums for the deaf community about the court system, DV, and stalking.*



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