



ZACH KLEIN

COLUMBUS CITY ATTORNEY

eNewsletter

Volume 3, Issue 3

From the Desk of City Attorney Zach Klein

After several challenging weeks, the continued sacrifices made by our first responders, frontline health care professionals, essential workers, and all those who responsibly adhered to the state’s shelter-in-place orders are still paying dividends. We’re not out of the woods yet, however. We all must continue to do our part by wearing masks, and we must strictly adhere to social distancing protocols—to protect ourselves and others. We are one community.

Such uncertainty can be scary. But it also presents us with opportunity. History has shown over and over again that times of crisis can become catalysts for change—and it is up to all of us to help determine which direction we go. As the famous economist Milton Friedman put it, “When you have a time of crisis what happens depends on what ideas are floating around, and what ideas have been developed, and thought through, and are made effective.”

In this latest e-newsletter, you’ll learn more about how our office has been able to address the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic by, in many ways, staying the course. Yes, we have made several changes and adaptations to our daily operations, but the guiding principles and vision for our office that have informed our decisions and policy choices since I became City Attorney in January 2018 have prepared us to meet these new challenges. Take for example our mission to focus on new and bold initiatives that help ensure justice, keep our neighborhoods safe, and promote economic opportunity.

These ideas and others have been developed. They have been thought through. And they have been effectively implemented before this crisis, during it, and most importantly, will continue to be advanced and expanded afterwards. In case you missed it, we’re providing a copy of my opinion-piece that recently ran in the Columbus Dispatch. It addresses this exact subject matter as it relates to criminal justice reform. We’re also continuing our long-standing advocacy on behalf of families and victims of domestic violence—which is so important given the [global spike](#) in these cases.

Finally, I want to leave you with something Thurgood Marshall said: “The measure of a country’s greatness is its ability to maintain compassion in time of crisis.” I implore everyone to be kind and compassionate to all those we encounter, especially when so many are experiencing stress, anxiety, and hardship. We have a long way to go, but there is light at the end of the tunnel. Hopefully we’ll emerge into the daylight stronger and better than before.

May 2020



In This Issue:

[Criminal Justice Reform](#)

[Podcast Appearance](#)

[More Help for Domestic Violence Victims](#)

This is an e-publication of:
Columbus City Attorney
Zach Klein
77 North Front Street
Columbus, Ohio 43215
Phone 614.645.7385
Fax 614.645.6949
www.columbuscityattorney.org

Criminal Justice Reform: Before, During and After the Pandemic

This opinion column from City Attorney Klein originally ran in [The Columbus Dispatch](#) on April 26, 2020:

Over the past few weeks, I've heard from students, professors and community members concerned about the effects of COVID-19 on individuals being held in Franklin County jails.

I share their concerns about slowing the spread of COVID-19 among all members of our community, including individuals in our jails. And with that goal in mind, the city attorney's office has been working every day with the clerk of courts, judges, sheriff and Columbus police to reduce the population in the safest way possible.

We have witnessed the dire impact of the highly contagious coronavirus in an overcrowded state prison system. This underscores how important it is that we evaluate policies to ensure only appropriate individuals are incarcerated to begin with.

Since becoming city attorney, my mission has been to work creatively and collaboratively to reduce the number of individuals who enter our jails. In order to change the fundamental inefficiencies and inequalities in our criminal justice system, we must determine the root causes of crime — such as poverty and addiction. That way we can connect individuals to community services that address those needs and help drive down recidivism rates. To support that effort, we initiated the country's first theft-diversion program to put individuals on a path to services and treatment instead of incarceration. Many community partners and agencies have worked with us, even during this pandemic.

A June 2019 overhaul of our office's bail policy for nonviolent offenders addresses a major barrier to fairness in the court system: poverty. The previous cash bail system meant individuals who could not afford to post bail had to remain in jail while awaiting trial. Meanwhile, others charged with the same offenses but having the financial ability to make bail were able to go free. That's no longer the case. Now, absent unique circumstances, our prosecutors, in partnership with the court, do not ask for cash bail for nonviolent misdemeanor crimes. Results are noticeable, both in promoting community safety and saving taxpayer dollars.

As it stands, most individuals in Franklin County jails are awaiting trials on felonies, which is not within the city attorney's jurisdiction. As for the misdemeanors handled by our office, my team has worked diligently to ensure that only the people who deserve to be in jail are kept there, specifically violent offenders (typically domestic and intimate partner violence), individuals charged with sex crimes and those who have had multiple OVIs. For the safety and protection of our entire community, these individuals should not be released automatically without a serious assessment of their offenses and propensity for violence.

...continued on Page Three



May 2020



In This Issue:

[Criminal Justice Reform](#)

[Podcast Appearance](#)

[More Help for Domestic Violence Victims](#)

This is an e-publication of:
Columbus City Attorney
Zach Klein
77 North Front Street
Columbus, Ohio 43215
Phone 614.645.7385
Fax 614.645.6949
www.columbuscityattorney.org

Criminal Justice Reform...continued from page two

Take domestic abusers, for example. Releasing those abusers would put them back in close contact with their victims and increase the risk for victims' safety. This is especially dangerous while we are all confined to our homes doing our part to fight the coronavirus. In recent weeks, Columbus has seen an average of 60 domestic violence arrests per week, and we've seen three domestic violence homicides in the past month. Keep in mind that we had seven such murders in all of 2019.

Our goal has always been to seek ways to make the criminal justice system more efficient, equitable and fair for all people, and that work continues throughout this COVID-19 pandemic. As we think together about the many impacts of this virus on our community, we cannot ignore overcrowded jails and prisons. The more we can do to reduce that population, the closer we will get to a more modern and equitable system — but that effort must continue even after we return to a more “normal” environment.

Though this public health crisis continues to challenge us each day, there are silver linings, too. I am optimistic that some of the adjustments we're making now could move our city forward in a positive way. We all want to offer relief and compassion as we navigate this unique time. Right now, with an opportunity to pause and reflect on what kind of community we want to build in the years to come, I know brighter days are ahead.

City Attorney Featured on 'The Other Side' Podcast

Criminal justice reform doesn't have to take place just in the four corners of the courtroom.

Our office is committed to determining the root cause of crime, developing innovative ways to promote social justice, and increasing community safety.

This [episode](#) of The Columbus Dispatch's “The Other Side” podcast was recorded on March 11, 2020—prior to the state's shelter-in-place order—and broadcast on April 20, 2020.

While the focus is on criminal justice reform, the conversation touched on a number of topics (although it appears that the discussion about City Attorney Klein's reputation as an “adventurous eater” didn't survive the cutting room floor).



May 2020



In This Issue:

[Criminal Justice Reform](#)

[Podcast Appearance](#)

[More Help for Domestic Violence Victims](#)

This is an e-publication of:
Columbus City Attorney
Zach Klein
77 North Front Street
Columbus, Ohio 43215
Phone 614.645.7385
Fax 614.645.6949
www.columbuscityattorney.org



In This Issue:

[Criminal Justice](#)[Reform](#)[Podcast Appearance](#)[More Help for
Domestic Violence](#)[Victims](#)

Protecting Domestic Violence Victims Remains Priority

Residents experiencing domestic violence are now be able to use text messaging to request help and resources from the Columbus City Attorney's office, after a new system was put in place last month in addition to phone calls.

Victims can reach the City Attorney's Domestic Violence & Stalking Unit by sending a text message to 614-653-8075 and providing domestic violence advocates with their name, a safe time to communicate, and an email or phone number where they can be reached. For their protection, victims are encouraged to delete their own messages after they are sent. The City Attorney's domestic violence advocates will contact the victim at the designated time to discuss safety planning for them and their family.

IMPORTANT: Anyone in immediate danger, should call or text 911.

For people experiencing domestic abuse while sheltering in place, there are very few opportunities to get away from an abuser to seek help. Columbus Police recently reported that they saw an increase in domestic violence-related calls in March. There were 3,226 calls about domestic violence during that month, which is more than 600 calls above average.

This increase in domestic violence incidents led to the text messaging solution for victims who can now reach out for help, even if they are fearful that their abuser may be within earshot.

This surge in domestic violence isn't a problem unique to Columbus. It's a worldwide crisis. The United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres recently [released a statement](#) calling for measures to address a "horrifying global surge" of domestic violence. Across the United States, visits to domestic violence websites [are up](#).

This led to City Attorney Klein's participation in a virtual seminar with international business leaders to discuss how to empower employees who may be experiencing domestic violence during the coronavirus pandemic.

Hosted by the global business consultants at [Fontheim International](#), the panel featured City Attorney Klein, along with Cindy Dyer and Jenny Smith—vice presidents at the women's NGO founded by Hillary Clinton and Madeleine Albright, [Vital Voices Global Partnership](#)—and Emily Crain, director at Fontheim and an expert on countering gender-based violence. The group discussed how business leaders can protect women and connect their employees to community resources, including shelters, counseling and more. City Attorney Klein highlighted his work on the front lines protecting victims of domestic violence, including his office's ongoing advocacy and the new text message service implemented to connect victims and their families to resources while quarantined with their abusers.

In addition to City Attorney's Domestic Violence & Stalking Unit, the [LSS CHOICES for Victims of Domestic Violence](#) hotline is available 24/7 at 614-224-4663.

Stay in Contact with the Office of Columbus City Attorney Zach Klein



Twitter



Facebook



Web



YouTube



Email