



ZACH KLEIN

COLUMBUS CITY ATTORNEY

eNewsletter

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From the Desk of City Attorney Zach Klein

Columbus is a growing, vibrant city. Anyone who has traveled lately can tell that we're a city on the rise. We have several advantages that would make many metropolitan areas envious, from our cultural diversity and numerous academic institutions to a diverse economy and a strong track record of public-private partnerships that benefit the greater good.

That's why it's so important that our laws and policies reflect a city ready to lead and be bold in embracing our many assets—both tangible and intrinsic—while also addressing our complex challenges. No one should be left behind as we build towards a better future for all. For our office and our mission, we focus on three important pillars: **Justice, Public Safety & Economic Opportunity**. They all interconnect and inter-relate.

Since becoming Columbus City Attorney nearly two years ago, I've been committed to finding creative and effective ways to reform the criminal justice system to make it more equitable and fair for all our residents. One of the challenging issues that demands our attention is the intersection of poverty and the criminal justice system. For many individuals, going through the criminal justice system can create, or exacerbate, lifelong barriers to housing and employment. This often leads to decreased job and educational opportunities without any benefit to increasing public safety.

We are working hard to do our part. Whether it's [bail reform](#), instituting a first-of-its-kind [diversion program](#) that identifies and treats the root causes of crime, implementing [prosecutor impact](#) training or [no longer prosecuting misdemeanor marijuana drug possession cases](#), we can also enhance public safety by addressing economic opportunity on the front-end.

This is what led us to an exciting, new partnership we just announced with the [United Way of Central Ohio](#) to help Columbus residents who qualify for earned income and child tax credits to receive the money back that they're due. The intersection between poverty and the criminal justice system is real, and ensuring families get the money legally owed to them under federal law is part of our holistic approach to improving public safety.

By committing to provide a free tax preparation site at our Prosecution Division in the Franklin County Municipal Courthouse and staffing another new site at COTA's downtown headquarters with our trained volunteers, we're dedicated to working with United Way on this partnership to make it another important component of our strategy to help individuals lift themselves up.

November 2019



In This Issue:

[EITC Partnership](#)

[Official Launch](#)

[Protecting
Neighborhoods](#)

[News and Notes](#)

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City Attorney, United Way Announce New Partnership

City Attorney Klein and United Way of Central Ohio president and CEO Lisa Courtice, Ph.D. announced the launch of a unique partnership last week to help low- and moderate-income households access critical tax services for free. The arrangement calls for new tax preparation sites and staffing, a public education campaign to raise awareness of the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), and training and certification for future volunteers.

The EITC is a special emphasis for the collaboration. According to the [Center on Budget and Policy Priorities](#), earned income and child tax credits were estimated to have helped lift 8.9 million people out of poverty in 2017.

The new partnership includes several commitments from the City Attorney's Office:

- A full-time staff member's community outreach responsibilities will be expanded to include assisting with increasing the capacity and reach of the [Tax Time](#) program.
- Opening a new tax site at the Columbus City Attorney's Prosecutor Division, located at the Franklin County Municipal Courthouse. The site will be open Tuesday-Thursday from 2:00-6:00 p.m. during tax season, and will be staffed by trained and certified City Attorney employees.
- COTA will open a new tax site at its downtown office, which will be staffed by volunteers from the City Attorney's Office. COTA's sponsorship also will include audio and visual advertising on buses and transit centers to promote greater public awareness of the EITC and Tax Time program.
- The City of Columbus government television station (C-TV) will help produce a public service announcement to increase public awareness of the EITC and Tax Time program.

According to United Way, this unique new partnership will help accelerate and expand the work Tax Time has done to assist hardworking families receive the returns they need to become more financially stable. At the announcement, Lisa Courtice called it a great example of how to invest in effective ways to help people and how United Way is building collaborations that fight poverty and create prosperity.

Tax Time—which is sponsored by the Internal Revenue Service, City of Columbus, Franklin County Job and Family Services, Park National Bank, Huntington Bank, Fifth Third Bank, PNC Bank, and COTA—is a network of nonprofit, business, and government organizations that works to provide free tax preparation services and connect low- and moderate-income households to financial resources.

Combining the United Way of Central Ohio's Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program and AARP's Tax Counseling for the Elderly (TCE) program, Tax Time operates over 30 sites throughout Franklin County during tax season every year from January through April. Other lead partners include the [Legal Aid Society of Columbus](#) and [HandsOn Central Ohio](#).

With the help of trained and certified volunteers who prepare federal and state tax returns, Tax Time has served over 137,000 clients—saving them an estimated \$8.7 million in tax preparation fees since 2007.

While the average income of Tax Time clients in 2019 was around \$26,000, the income cap for next year is \$56,000.

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[EITC Partnership](#)

[Official Launch](#)

[Protecting
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[News and Notes](#)

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Intimate Partner Homicide Prevention Project

City Attorney Zach Klein was joined by dozens of community partners and stakeholders last week to formally launch a federal grant-assisted program designed to help communities identify and overcome challenges in implementing domestic violence-related gun laws. The Domestic Violence Homicide Prevention Firearms Technical Assistance Project—which is administered through the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges and the U.S. Department of Justice’s Office on Violence Against Women—was awarded to Columbus earlier this year.



The grant program helps design and implement community-specific strategies to disarm abusers by providing access to expert consultants and DOJ staff, intensive training, technical assistance, and a framework for enhanced inter-agency collaboration and cooperation.

National statistics show that intimate partner homicide is five times more likely to occur when an abuser has access to firearms—and FBI data consistently shows that every year since 2001, 55 percent of women killed by an intimate partner were shot with a firearm.

Some of the areas of focus for the City Attorney’s office include:

- 911 call response and initial response by law enforcement at the scene: ensuring that officers learn about and use all available legal authority to seize or obtain the surrender of firearms when responding to domestic violence incidents.
- Pre-trial hearings: enhancing the court’s ability to learn about offenders’ access to firearms and to issue pre-trial orders (bail, conditions of release, etc.) that effectively prevent such access. Pre-trial negotiations and pleas: ensuring that all relevant stakeholders avoid limiting or eliminating conviction-based firearm prohibitions as part of the plea negotiation process.
- Trial, conviction, and sentencing: implementing strategies, including meeting requirements for specific court records, to facilitate enforcement of state, local, and federal prohibitions that result from a domestic violence conviction.
- Post-conviction probation/parole: ensuring issuance of probation and other postconviction orders that include clear and enforceable provisions regarding firearms, as well as post-conviction compliance monitoring.

Project partners include: The Columbus City Attorney’s Office; Franklin County Prosecutor’s Office; Columbus Division of Police; Franklin County Sheriff’s Office; Franklin County Municipal Court - Pretrial and Probation Services; Capital University Law School Family Advocacy Clinic; Franklin County Office of Justice Policy and Programs; CHOICES for Victims of Domestic Violence; Lutheran Social Services; Center for Family Safety and Healing; and Columbus Public Health’s Council of Minority Health.

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[EITC Partnership](#)

[Official Launch](#)

[Protecting
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[News and Notes](#)

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[EITC Partnership](#)
[Official Launch](#)
[Protecting
Neighborhoods](#)
[News and Notes](#)

Protecting Neighborhoods

A lingerie store doubling as a strip club was put out of business recently by the City of Columbus. The east side property was the scene of shootouts, drug dealing, violent crime, and liquor law violations. City Attorney Klein secured the emergency court order to vacate and shutter the store called “Sexxy 4 Less”—which was actually serving as a front for an underground strip club called “Club Sexxy.”



According to court documents, the Columbus Division of Police began covert surveillance of the premises earlier this summer, obtaining evidence of illegal drug and alcohol sales. Patrons reportedly were told that the illicit club was “drug friendly.” Investigators also linked a July shootout at the premises to a homicide that had occurred a month earlier.

The club operators were a husband and wife team with a history of felony convictions, including aggravated robbery, felonious assault, breaking and entering, forgery, improper handling of a firearm, and aggravated drug trafficking.

The property was located at 1471 East Livingston Avenue, which is two blocks away from another dangerous and illegal after-hours club that the city [shut down](#) the previous month. Families with children lived in apartments directly above the lingerie store.

On July 21, 2019, the city’s ShotSpotter alert system detected up to 17 shots fired in a shoot-out that wounded two individuals at the premises. A subsequent police investigation linked spent shell-casings from this incident to a homicide that occurred on June 2, 2019.

On August 31, 2019, detectives conducting an undercover investigation obtained a covert purchase of cocaine and also noted that illegal alcohol sales were taking place at the premises.

On September 15, 2019 one of the dancers, who claimed she was working at an “exotic dancewear party” at the club, filed a police report that her firearm was stolen from the premises.

On September 18, 2019, law enforcement officials sent a warning letter via certified mail to the property owner notifying him of his responsibility to abate the criminal nuisance activity occurring at the premises, or face legal action. The letter was signed as received, but the illegal activity continued.

On September 28, 2019, the ongoing police investigation obtained a covert purchase of cocaine from the premises. Illegal alcohol sales also were still taking place.

“It’s extremely disturbing to know that children and their families were living in apartments directly above this illegal operation,” said Assistant City Attorney Heidi Tawardos, who helped try the case. “Most troubling was the fact that the shoot-out occurred in the parking lot of the club, which was shared by the families living there.”

News and Notes

City Attorney Klein joined police, neighborhood, and code enforcement officials at a **press conference** announcing steps the city is taking at the Colonial Village apartment complex, where there have been thousands of police calls and more than 220 housing code and environmental violations.



City Attorney Klein served as a panelist at The Ohio State University's **John Glenn College of Public Affairs** forum on criminal justice reform.

City Attorney Klein met with participants in the Pathways Program, an initiative of the **Department of Homeland Security & Justice Programs** to provide re-entry services for women that have mental illness or co-occurring substance use disorder. The goal is to reduce recidivism by 50 percent and help these women restore their lives.



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[EITC Partnership](#)

[Official Launch](#)

[Protecting
Neighborhoods](#)

[News and Notes](#)

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5

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