



ZACH KLEIN
COLUMBUS CITY ATTORNEY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Thursday, May 18, 2023
Contact: Pete Shipley, 614.965.0203
Email: pjshipley@columbus.gov

As City Leaders Push for Safer Streets, City Attorney Klein Files Lawsuit to Expand City's Ability to Take Meaningful Action on Gun Safety

City Attorney Klein says lawsuit could pave the way for City to establish gun free zones in entertainment districts, parks and other highly-populated areas

COLUMBUS, OH—As City leaders gathered Thursday in the Short North to outline a multi-pronged neighborhood safety strategy, City Attorney Klein announced his office has filed a lawsuit that would allow law enforcement and prosecutors to enforce gun safety measures that are already on the books and let the City take additional actions to improve public safety in entertainment districts, parks and other high traffic, densely populated areas of the city.

The City's lawsuit against the State of Ohio, filed in the Franklin County Court of Common Pleas, would urge the Court to declare that the City's gun safety ordinances, including requirements for safe storage of firearms, prohibitions on high-capacity magazines, and measures to make it easier to prosecute individuals selling guns to dangerous criminals prohibited from possessing firearms, are enforceable and that the state law restricting local authority on commonsense gun laws is unconstitutional, as was preliminarily ruled on by the Court in November 2022.

"We know what it takes to make our neighborhoods safe: police, prosecution, people, and the political will to enact effective gun laws. Here in Columbus, we're investing in these things and enacting the kinds of laws that will make a difference, but state officials continue to intentionally make it harder for police to do their job and for the City to take the actions we know will promote responsible gun ownership and reduce gun violence in our neighborhoods—the actions people in neighborhoods from the Short North to Linden are asking for," said Columbus City Attorney Zach Klein.

The lawsuit comes amid much confusion as opponents, including the State of Ohio, continue an all-out assault on the City's attempts to enforce safety measures meant to reduce gun violence and keep kids and communities safe. Lawsuits have been filed in multiple counties to block the implementation of the City's gun safety ordinances. In one lawsuit, state officials have used arguments that go so far as to say that a City ordinance keeping firearms out of the hands of minors is unconstitutional because Ohio allowed for child soldiers during the Civil War.

If the Court strikes down the State's prohibition on even the most minor local gun safety ordinances, City Attorney Klein says that could open the door for real conversations on how best to reduce gun violence, encourage responsible gun ownership, and deploy safety strategies that would work best in Columbus, including implementing gun free zones in entertainment districts like the Short North, city parks and other community events with large crowds like festivals, parades and sporting events.

“Entertainment districts like the Short North, parks or areas around arenas or stadiums on game days where there is a mix of alcohol, heavy traffic and high volumes of people aren't places where we need more guns, but state restrictions are making it harder for police to do their jobs and for the City to ensure safety for all who live, work and visit these areas,” added Columbus City Attorney Zach Klein.

The lawsuit also challenges a state law passed in 2022 that puts burdensome prohibitions on local authorities from declaring emergencies that would require the temporary closure of businesses in a given area to protect the health and safety of the community, including gun stores. The City argues that this prohibition could threaten public safety during a state of emergency.

“The City is prepared to defend its right to enact and enforce gun safety laws that make sense for us here in Columbus, just as we are in countless other areas of the law,” said Columbus Solicitor General Rich Coglianese. **“Carving out exceptions because that's what the NRA wants doesn't make it constitutional. It simply makes it harder for police and prosecutors to do their jobs.”**

In April, [City Attorney Klein announced a guilty plea](#) in the first test of the City's safe storage law on a case where a young child found a loaded gun in between couch cushions, picked the firearm up to play with it, pointed it toward his head, and accidentally discharged the weapon.

City officials have pointed to several similar incidents in recent weeks where minors have discharged weapons, but because of the State's court action to temporarily halt the City's gun safety ordinances, no charges for safe storage violations can be made at the current time even if the facts of the case show a clear violation of the City's ordinance, making it harder for police and prosecutors to hold accountable those responsible for minors accessing these firearms.

[A copy of the City's lawsuit is attached.](#)

###