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City of Columbus Seeks to Join Fight to Defend Federal Rules Protecting Personal Medical Information

*Says lawsuits challenging HIPAA protections are dangerous to public health
and undermine decades of rules safeguarding patient information*

COLUMBUS, OH— Columbus City Attorney Zach Klein today announced that the City of Columbus filed motions with the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Texas in two separate cases challenging key HIPAA regulations that protect the privacy and medical information of patients across the country. The City is asking the Court to join as a defendant in both cases challenging HIPAA’s 2000 and 2024 patient privacy rules that could have serious consequences for the privacy of health data for anyone seeking healthcare in the United States.

“No matter your politics, we should all agree that protecting a patient’s medical information should be a top priority,” said **Columbus City Attorney Zach Klein**. “Patients who seek care should have the assurance that their interaction with a healthcare provider remains confidential. It seems like common sense, but those bedrock principles are under attack, and why the City is petitioning the Court to allow us to defend these rules, because without them, anyone’s personal health data could then be accessible by employers or those who want to prosecute lawful medical care. That’s just not right.”

In September, the state of Texas filed a lawsuit challenging both the Biden administration’s 2024 rule protecting the privacy of individuals seeking lawful reproductive care as well as the 2000 HIPAA rules underpinning all patient privacy protections at every level, from doctors and healthcare systems to medical insurers and anyone who has access to a patient’s medical records.

In addition to the state’s lawsuit, a separate lawsuit was brought by a Texas-based medical doctor suing the Department of Health and Human Services over the same reproductive health care privacy rules, which include everything from abortion care and contraception to HIV treatment, sexual health and other reproductive health care services.

With its filings with the U.S. District Court, the City is seeking to join these cases to defend the HIPAA rules because of the impact they would have on the City's health department, which provides medical care to thousands of Columbus residents daily.

“Columbus Public Health is a trusted partner in protecting the health and safety of our residents,” said **Health Commissioner Dr. Mysheika Roberts**.

“Patient privacy laws are not political. They are in place to give patients control over their own personal health information and how it can be shared, which is critical to building trust and getting the health care services they need, when they need them.”

Columbus Public Health serves as a direct medical service provider for thousands of Columbus residents every day, offering everything from immunizations and medical testing to reproductive care, dental services, and healthcare services for new moms. In total, more than 600 public health employees operate more than 90 different public health programs as well as nine outpatient clinics that treat more than 10,000 patients each year.

CPH's Women's Health and Wellness Center currently provides confidential reproductive health care for women, their partners, and teens, which includes testing, treatment, contraceptive services, pregnancy testing and other medical services—all of which would be compromised if HIPAA protections were to be rolled back.

Additionally, the department plays a pivotal role in intervening in human trafficking cases, providing critical care and sexual health services to survivors. The City's public health workers fear that if patient privacy protections are rolled back, fewer human trafficking survivors will seek the help and services that they need in addition to many other residents who may put off necessary care due to privacy concerns.

The City says that eroding HIPAA regulations would ultimately undermine trust between clinicians and patients at a time when patients are increasingly concerned about the confidentiality of their discussions with and treatment by health care providers. Without HIPAA's baseline protections in place, patients would have no assurances that their personal medical information is safeguarded or being improperly disclosed to anyone, from employers to law enforcement or other actors who would want access to medical data.

No determination on the City's filings has been made by the Court.

The City of Madison, Wisconsin, and Doctors for America joined Columbus to file these motions.