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Columbus City Attorney reflects on historic first term, looks ahead to next four years

COLUMBUS, OH—With his second term underway, Columbus City Attorney Zach Klein today recapped his first four years in office and offered his thoughts on what he wants to see for Columbus in the coming years, outlining a shortlist of priorities for the City Attorney’s Office.

In his first term, City Attorney Klein elevated the office to be a national model for proactive litigation protecting civil rights, a watchdog for consumers, a leader in reforming the criminal justice system, and an effective check on drugs and violent crime in Columbus neighborhoods.

“Over the last four years, we raised our profile to give Columbus a voice on the national stage, taking on abuses of power and fighting for city residents and consumers,” said City Attorney Zach Klein. **“We implemented innovative programs to make our criminal justice system more equitable, and reduced recidivism by connecting individuals in need with community resources, prioritizing treatment over jail time. We shut down a record-number of dangerous drug houses, took necessary steps to improve police-community relations and saved the Crew. We aimed high and delivered.”**

City Attorney Zach Klein was elected to office in 2017 on a platform of criminal justice reform, social equity and protections for residents and consumers. Under Klein’s leadership, each section of the City Attorney’s Office delivered major wins for city residents.

- The Zone Initiative acted aggressively to protect the safety and security of Columbus neighborhoods, shutting down dozens of drug houses and ensuring safe and sanitary living conditions at Columbus apartment complexes. The team worked with the Columbus Police Department to implement a community immersion program and established Project Taillight, a program that funds repairs for safety equipment on vehicles of low-income residents rather than issuing citations. The Zone Initiative also established a program that funds home repairs for low-income seniors, allowing them to remain up to code and stay in their homes.
- The General Counsel section helped broker a deal to keep the Crew in Columbus, assisted in the formation and implementation of the Civilian Police Review Board, responded to the COVID-19 pandemic, and, along with cities and counties across the country, filed and pursued a lawsuit seeking to hold Opiate manufacturers and distributors accountable for the Opiate epidemic, leading to a historic statewide

settlement agreement designed, via the OneOhio Recovery Foundation, to invest in opioid treatment and prevention programs at the local level.

- The Prosecution section handled over 10,000 criminal prosecutions each year during Klein's first term, including thousands of domestic violence and impaired driving cases. The division also created an innovative program to connect those with nonviolent offenses with opportunities for diversion rather than prosecution. That program saw a recidivism rate of less than 10 percent. Additionally, Klein changed bail recommendations for nonviolent, non-repeat offenders, freeing up space and resources for the city to focus on violent offenders awaiting trial and save taxpayer money. He also ended the prosecution of misdemeanor marijuana possession. Under Klein's leadership, Columbus was also one of six sites nationally selected for a grant program to assist officials in keeping firearms out of the hands of domestic violence offenders, and one of two cities nationally selected by the American Prosecutors Association to receive a grant to restore legitimacy and trust in the criminal justice system through creative and data-driven changes to prosecution, all with a focus on public safety.
- Under Klein, Columbus has also taken a more active role weighing in on national policy issues affecting Columbus residents, including litigation filed by the Solicitor General to challenge the Trump administration's attack on the Affordable Care Act. Columbus also joined as a plaintiff in a lawsuit challenging former President Trump's attempt to include citizenship status on the 2020 census, and successfully sued FirstEnergy over a multi-million dollar surcharge to Ohio consumers under House Bill 6, legislation at the heart of the largest public bribery and racketeering scandal in Ohio history.
- The Litigation section has successfully represented the City in large cases in state and federal court, notably [winning a sweeping victory](#) in 2019 to protect access to clean drinking water in Columbus.
- The Real Estate section closed on the sale of the \$3 million Scioto Peninsula Redevelopment Project and made critical purchases for more than \$12 million to invest and improve sewer and water infrastructure as Columbus continues to grow at record rates. Additionally, the section purchased millions of dollars' worth of future parkland to serve city residents, including the \$5.2 million purchase of 58 acres of greenspace in northwest Columbus to be turned into a new park.
- The Claims section worked to expand a mediation program to help Columbus residents reach resolutions that helped many reduce their tax liability without litigation. Mediation services are provided cost-free and allow taxpayers to avoid costs associated with a court case. The program has helped many Columbus residents find payment solutions without negatively impacting credit scores.
- In the wake of protests in downtown Columbus, City Attorney Klein worked to implement changes to the City's protest response procedures, including appointing special counsel to investigate and review police actions and street clearing procedures, as well as pushing to end the broad use of chemical agents against nonviolent protesters. Additionally, Klein worked collaboratively on systemic changes to improve police-community relations, including the creation of the Civilian Police Review Board, and moving charging decisions for alleged misdemeanor criminal offenses to the City Attorney's Office for review before they are filed. Klein and Mayor Andrew Ginther also invited the United States Department of Justice to Columbus to assist in changing and improving policies, practices and procedures of the Columbus Division of Police. The DOJ has accepted that invitation.

Klein also outlined a shortlist of priorities for his second term, including focusing on crime in Columbus neighborhoods, shuttering violent and drug-ridden properties, continually improving policing in Columbus, and protecting businesses, consumers, and voters.

“We cannot rest on the historic success of the past four years,” said City Attorney Klein. **“Our City still has challenges to meet, from public safety and police-community relations to voter and consumer protection. If there is a way for us to get it done, we will. I’ll continue to listen to the concerns of City residents and community leaders and work together to make the City Attorney’s Office effective, efficient and responsive to the needs of our city.”**

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