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Columbus City Attorney's Year-End Review Reveals Priorities for 2019

City Attorney Zach Klein reflects on his first year as Columbus' chief prosecutor while looking ahead to shape vision for office's future

COLUMBUS—When Columbus City Attorney Zach Klein raised his right hand and took the oath of office on January 1, 2018, he pledged to challenge both himself and his team to be “bold and creative” in how to use the full breadth of the office to better serve Columbus residents.

One of his first moves was creating the City Solicitor General's office, a position designed to promote important public policy changes. He also established a Proactive Litigation Team for the City Attorney's office to actively seek opportunities to protect the rights of Columbus residents. And, finally, he unleashed the Zone Initiative Unit to be as aggressive as possible in shutting down problem properties and holding bad landlords accountable. The ensuing results have already had an impact on the city:

- **New Gun Ordinances** – The City Attorney's office led the way in drafting and helping enact a series of common sense gun laws, including a ban on bump stocks and prohibitions against domestic abusers and other violent criminals from possessing firearms. While the city ordinances were passed in May, the office continues to defend them in court against litigation brought by gun lobby groups.
- **Columbus Crew Lawsuit** – This important lawsuit recently culminated in the announcement that the prospective new owners of the Columbus Crew were committing to build a new stadium while also helping turn the old stadium site into a community sports park. The City Attorney's joint lawsuit filed in conjunction with the Ohio Attorney General's office, and the city's subsequent motion to toll, or pause, the six-month negotiating period helped #SaveTheCrew from moving to Austin, Texas and paved the way for the deal to take shape.
- **Affordable Care Act Lawsuit** – In August, the City of Columbus became the lead plaintiff in a suit against the Trump Administration for intentionally and unlawfully sabotaging the Affordable Care Act (ACA). The 130-page complaint asserts that in systematically attacking the ACA, President Trump is raising the cost of health coverage and increasing the number of uninsured Americans, both of which have a negative effect on Columbus' general operating budget. The suit also outlines how these intentional actions violate the President's lawful duty under the “Take Care Clause” of the U.S. Constitution.
- **Settlement of Largest Public Nuisance Lawsuit in City History** – After months of negotiations with Illinois-based property owner AMG Realty Group, a comprehensive

joint agreement was made to ensure the three Columbus apartment complexes will be maintained to meet Columbus City Codes, including a compliance schedule, proactive maintenance and pest control, ensuring refuse collection and litter pickup, and hiring security guards at all three locations, and more. AMG agreed to pay the City of Columbus a \$50,000 administrative fine, which will go toward Mayor Ginther's Eviction Prevention program.

- **U.S. Census Lawsuit** – Last May, Columbus joined the State of New York in a lawsuit to block the federal government from demanding citizenship information in the 2020 U.S. Census. City Attorney Klein explained at the time that Columbus was joining the lawsuit in part because of the decades of bipartisan recognition that demanding citizenship information would lead to greatly depressed census participation in communities with large immigrant populations, potentially threatening critical federal funds and fair representation in Congress and the Electoral College. In 2017, Columbus received nearly \$100 million in federal grant programs, many of which relied on the population figures collected in the census to distribute federal funds among states and local governments.
- **Title X Funding Lawsuit** – City Attorney Klein led the national effort to garner support from cities across the country to help bolster Planned Parenthood's lawsuit to protect Title X funding. The City of Columbus filed an amicus brief, with several other cities attached as signatories, in support of Planned Parenthood's request for a federal injunction to keep funding that has long been used to expand access to contraceptive care and reproductive health care for low-income, uninsured, and underinsured individuals.

“I’m proud of what we’ve accomplished so far, but there’s still so much more work to do,” City Attorney Klein said. “We have many new goals for 2019, including, for example, meaningful criminal justice reform that improves Ohio’s drug sentencing laws without compromising the safety of our communities.”

During his swearing-in ceremony 12 months ago, City Attorney Klein also committed to continue prioritizing neighborhood safety and looking for new ways to protect the most vulnerable members of our community.

The statistics from 2018 bear out these promises:

- 4419 domestic violence cases prosecuted and victim advocacy services provided to approximately 5500 victims.
- 410 code violation nuisance abatement cases filed.
- 109 properties referred to the city's Vacant and Abandoned Property team for demolition.
- Dozens of criminal activity nuisance abatement lawsuits filed, shutting down 19 drug houses, two apartment buildings, and five carry-outs due to violent crime, drug sales and illegal alcohol sales.
- Objected to four hotel/motel permits. Two were resolved with agreed orders and two were sold to new owners.
- A massage parlor that investigators claimed was a front for prostitution was put out of business, as city attorneys used civil litigation to shut down a human trafficking operation for the first time ever.
- Settlement reached with AMG Realty Group, defendant in the largest public nuisance lawsuit in city history.

- More than \$4.7 million brought into the General Fund through in-house and outside agency delinquent tax collections (as of November 30, 2018).
- \$2.8 million in new federal funding secured to help expand local opioid intervention programs.
- 800 drug deactivation bags secured and distributed to the public free-of-charge to encourage safe and responsible at-home drug disposal.
- Provided legal work to transfer 235 deeds to the City Land Bank.
- Provided legal advice, instrument preparation, and negotiating services for 339 land acquisitions related to future development projects.

“During our first year, we focused on how to use the full breadth of this office to best advocate for our city, and I’m enthusiastic about the issues we are working to tackle in 2019,” said Columbus City Attorney Zach Klein. “From criminal justice reform to continuing our aggressive effort to clean up neighborhoods, we want to keep working on creative and collaborative solutions to help make lives better for all Columbus residents.”

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