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City Attorney Klein, Community Leaders Announce Commitment and Recommendations for Reforms

COLUMBUS – Today, Columbus City Attorney Zach Klein was joined by Stephanie Hightower, Columbus Urban League President and CEO; Elder Larry Price, Columbus Chapter of the NAACP Chairman of the Criminal and Justice Committee; and Pastor Frederick LaMarr, Baptist Pastor's Conference of Columbus President in calling for sweeping reforms to change the culture of justice in Columbus.

“The death of George Floyd and the protests that have followed have, yet again, brought our nation’s grave failings and our long history of systematic racism to the forefront,” said Klein. “We cannot let pleas for justice and change fall by the wayside.”

Klein outlined eight action steps* to start assessing and improving police-community relations in the city.

“None of us can ignore or deny the overwhelming data that demonstrates how institutional racism consistently tilts the scales against people of color, and particularly Black people,” said Hightower. “I’m heartened that the City Attorney and his team can offer us bypasses around the roadblocks that have prevented real progress for too long.”

Klein intends to work with Mayor Andrew Ginther, Columbus City Council, Black community leaders, Columbus Police, the faith community and citizens to implement these reforms.

“Leaders have a responsibility to ensure that all community members are respected and safe and that law enforcement have the training, policies and procedures that reflect our expectations,” said Klein. “We recognize that there have already been some good-faith efforts to implement these recommendations, but we have a long way to go. And we have to act without delay.”

**Editor’s note: The City Attorney’s recommendations can be found below.*

PROTEST RESPONSE AND CROWD CONTROL PROCEDURES:

1. Appoint special counsel to perform an independent, outside investigation and review of the City of Columbus' handling of the past week's events.
2. Conduct a review of Columbus Division of Police policies and procedures regarding the clearing of streets during peaceful demonstrations in order to avoid unnecessary confrontations between law enforcement and those exercising their First Amendment rights.
3. Change the Columbus Division of Police policies on using chemical agents to comport with best practices as identified by Matrix Consulting, thereby ending broad use of chemical agents against nonviolent protesters and requiring verbal warnings.
4. The Columbus City Attorney's Office has submitted evidence to the Internal Affairs Bureau (IAB) and will continue to do so as it is gathered. To date, we have submitted photos and videos of uses of chemical agents being used on protestors, the widely seen images of the man standing passively with his hands up as he is being maced in the face, and more. We encourage members of the public to do the same. We also request members of the public submit to police any and all evidence they may have that could potentially identify individuals or groups inciting violence and destruction so that we can hold those individuals accountable. Evidence can be submitted to the Department of Public Safety's Equal Opportunity Compliance Office at reportCPD@columbus.gov or directly to IAB at IABDeskSgt@columbuspolice.org.

SYSTEMIC CHANGES TO IMPROVE POLICE-COMMUNITY RELATIONS:

5. Create a Citizen Review Board, as recommended by the Community Safety Commission. The current FOP contract places limitations on how this can be fully implemented in the short-term. Accordingly, the Columbus City Attorney's Office is reviewing the current FOP contract to identify immediate opportunities where civilian review can be implemented.
6. Move charging decisions for alleged misdemeanor criminal offenses to the Columbus City Attorney's Office for review before they are filed, similar to the charging process for the Franklin County Prosecutor with felony offenses. Officers will still have the immediate ability to arrest in a violent situation, but then the City Attorney's Office, through its charging process, will assure only appropriate charges are then filed. Citizens being charged for most non-violent offenses will receive a summons for court instead of being incarcerated prior to trial.
7. Conduct a review of the Columbus City Code relating to traffic and pedestrian offenses and examine how enforcement of those offenses can have an adverse impact on building trust between the police and the Black community.

8. Dedicate additional hours to the Columbus Division of Police's training program, separate from the current curriculum, for an immersion experience that helps build a relationship between the officers and the communities they serve prior to graduation. The purpose of these hours is for recruits to spend time building relationships and a commitment to those neighbors and community leaders, not in a law enforcement capacity but in public service, before they begin policing. The Columbus City Attorney's team, who works directly with those communities, will serve as a resource for officers learning about the unique struggles of those neighborhoods.

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