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City of Columbus Wins Competitive Grant to Prevent Intimate Partner Homicides

Columbus City Attorney Zach Klein secured federal technical assistance grant to enhance implementation and enforcement of domestic violence gun laws

COLUMBUS, OH—Columbus City Attorney Zach Klein announced today that his office secured a highly competitive technical assistance grant that is designed to help communities identify and overcome challenges in implementing domestic violence-related gun laws. The Domestic Violence Homicide Prevention Firearms Technical Assistance Project—which is administered through the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges and the U.S. Department of Justice’s Office on Violence Against Women—was awarded to Columbus as well as: Birmingham, Alabama; Brooklyn, New York; Spokane, Washington; the Oklahoma Tribal Nation; and the state of Vermont.

The grant program helps design and implement community-specific strategies to disarm abusers by providing access to expert consultants and DOJ staff, intensive training, technical assistance, and a framework for enhanced inter-agency collaboration and cooperation.

National statistics show that intimate partner homicide is five times more likely to occur when an abuser has access to firearms—and FBI data consistently shows that every year since 2001, 55 percent of women killed by an intimate partner were shot with a firearm.

“Securing this technical assistance grant will help us expand our ability to enforce domestic violence-related firearms laws, which data proves can significantly reduce the rate of intimate partner homicide,” said Columbus City Attorney Zach Klein. “While the gun lobby continues promoting their extreme agenda by defending the rights of violent criminals and domestic abusers to keep firearms in the City of Columbus—even though federal law prohibits those convicted of domestic violence and other violent felonies from possessing firearms—we will keep fighting to make our community safer.”

In May 2018, the City of Columbus passed four ordinances that made dozens of technical and substantive changes to the city’s criminal codes related to firearms offenses, including laws to prohibit convicted domestic abusers and other violent felons from possessing firearms. After this set of common sense gun regulations went into effect, the gun lobby sued the city on two provisions, including the new domestic violence firearms statute that simply conformed city code to match already existing federal prohibitions. While the trial court agreed last year that Columbus acted constitutionally in closing the gap between existing federal prohibitions and state law—which remained “unduly lax” in preventing certain ex-convicts and those who are

subject of a protection order from possessing weapons—the gun lobby appealed the judge’s ruling. The appellate court’s decision is still pending.

The planning and assessment phase of the grant program, which will include a number of local partners in addition to the City Attorney’s office, will begin this summer and will focus on several different subjects such as victim advocacy and law enforcement’s response to the use of firearms to threaten, intimidate, and control.

Some of the areas of focus for the City Attorney’s office are likely to include:

- 911 call response and initial response by law enforcement at the scene: ensuring that officers learn about and use all available legal authority to seize or obtain the surrender of firearms when responding to domestic violence incidents.
- Pre-trial hearings: enhancing the court’s ability to learn about offenders’ access to firearms and to issue pre-trial orders (bail, conditions of release, *etc.*) that effectively prevent such access.
- Pre-trial negotiations and pleas: ensuring that all relevant stakeholders avoid limiting or eliminating conviction-based firearm prohibitions as part of the plea negotiation process.
- Trial, conviction, and sentencing: implementing strategies, including meeting requirements for specific court records, to facilitate enforcement of state, local, and federal prohibitions that result from a domestic violence conviction.
- Post-conviction probation/parole: ensuring issuance of probation and other post-conviction orders that include clear and enforceable provisions regarding firearms, as well as post-conviction compliance monitoring.

Local partners who will help serve on the project management team include:

- Columbus Division of Police
- Franklin County Prosecutor’s office
- Franklin County Pretrial and Probation Service
- Columbus Public Health
- Franklin County Domestic Relations Court
- LSS CHOICES for Victims of Domestic Violence
- The Center for Family Safety and Healing

Along with the Columbus City Attorney’s Domestic Violence and Stalking Unit, the project leader will be Joseph M. Gibson, First Assistant City Attorney – Prosecution.

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