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Columbus City Attorney Releases Memo on Body Worn Cameras and Medical Treatment Privacy

Memo to police chief emphasizes City's commitment to transparency while also safeguarding privacy of public and police officers

COLUMBUS, OH—On Wednesday, April 25, 2018, Columbus City Attorney Zach Klein released a copy of a memo he sent earlier today to Columbus Division of Police Chief Kimberly Jacobs regarding the review of body worn camera (BWC) recordings that captures footage of medical treatment of private citizens or public safety personnel.

City Attorney Klein issued the memo after hearing concerns from police personnel following the release of a video of one of their fellow officers receiving emergency medical treatment while in the line of duty, after being exposed to fentanyl.

The memo explains that it is the legal advice of the Columbus City Attorney's Office that BWC "recordings, which capture medical treatment being rendered to individuals, including Columbus Division of Police and Columbus Division of Fire personnel, should not be released in response to a public records request, or a subpoena, prior to legal review by the City Attorney's Office."

According to the memo, the City Attorney's legal review would occur in a timely fashion, and as quickly as possible, to comply with all provisions of Ohio's public records law. The purpose of the legal review would be to evaluate whether a requested recording contained any content that involved footage exempted from public release under Ohio's medical record exceptions and/or content that private citizens or public safety personnel have a right to protect from release under state or federal law.

"Transparency and accountability are the reasons why I originally pushed so hard for the city to implement body worn cameras," said Columbus City Attorney Zach Klein. "However, there was always concern that we had to balance both public interest and laws that protect an individual's right to privacy, and this memo seeks to achieve both for all parties involved."