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City Attorney Takes ‘Civil’ Approach in Fight Against Drug Epidemic

COLUMBUS, OH—Columbus City Attorney Richard C. Pfeiffer, Jr. announced that his civil motion requesting an emergency restraining order was granted today in the Franklin County Environmental Court, allowing city officials to immediately evacuate and board up a notorious west side dwelling known for drug trafficking, prostitution, and at least one near-fatal overdose.

The property, located at 2723 Sullivant Avenue—which is within a half-mile radius of two elementary schools—will remain boarded up pending a hearing for preliminary and permanent injunction against the owner. If the property is ultimately declared to be a statutorily defined public nuisance, state law grants the court authority to order the premises shut down for up to one year.

“The drug scourge that is plaguing our society requires a broad-based response,” said City Attorney Richard C. Pfeiffer, Jr. “From criminal prosecution and civil litigation to treatment and addiction services, all facets of our community must be engaged in this fight.”

Following up on community complaints, Columbus Police Division narcotics detectives made covert purchases of crack-cocaine from 2723 Sullivant Ave. on July 18, July 25, and July 26. A subsequent search warrant identified cameras, monitors, digital scales, a bolt action rifle, and large amounts of cash, along with 20 people and one dog, inside the premises.

Police officials sent a certified letter to the owner, Zachary Lawrence, notifying him of the nuisance drug activity occurring at his property.

The certified mail receipt was signed by Lawrence but the illegal activities at the premises continued.

Following two more covert purchases of illegal narcotics, detectives executed a second search warrant on October 25. Detectives found close to 50 grams of crack cocaine and 20 grams of heroin. Twenty-one people were located inside the premises during the search warrant, including a female overdose victim who required two doses of Narcan on-site and two more at a hospital to revive her. Prostitution activity also was occurring during the search.

The drug activity continued, as detectives made another covert purchase of crack-cocaine on November 2.

“We appreciate the judge weighing our concerns over the potential for fatalities, either from gun violence or a drug overdose, in granting our emergency request to shut down this drug den,” said Assistant City Attorney Kristen Dickerson.

In filing a civil motion for injunctive relief, Dickerson, who is the Zone Initiative Attorney assigned to the west side of Columbus, is seeking to prove that Lawrence is guilty of maintaining a nuisance by establishing that he, as owner of the premises, “knew of, participated in, or acquiesced to the activity which constituted the nuisance” as prescribed by [Chapter 3767](#) of the Ohio Revised Code.

Copies of the city’s complaint and supporting documents can be found [here](#).

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