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Columbus Cracks Down on Crack Houses, Shutting Down Two in One Day

Hilltop and South of Main properties the scene of cocaine and heroin trafficking, drug overdoses, sexual assault, domestic violence, robbery

COLUMBUS, OH—Columbus City Attorney Zach Klein announced today that the City of Columbus secured emergency court orders to vacate and shutter two properties that were plaguing their respective neighborhoods with crime, drugs, and violence. The Columbus Division of Police targeted both in separate covert investigations after officers responded to the premises for incidents ranging from multiple drug overdoses, sexual assault, and domestic violence to weapons violations, stolen vehicles, robbery, and burglary.

City Attorney Klein's office filed dual motions for *ex parte* temporary restraining orders in the Franklin County Environmental Court to board up [674 South Oakley Avenue](#) on the city's west side and [644 Fairwood Avenue](#) in the South of Main neighborhood. Columbus Police and other city agents surprised the occupants earlier this morning to remove them from the premises and enforce the court's orders.

“The drug epidemic is one of the most dangerous threats to the health, safety, and well-being of our neighborhoods, and we need to be bold and aggressive in how we address this life-and-death issue,” said Columbus City Attorney Zach Klein. **“As I continue to advocate for reforming our state drug sentencing laws, I’m very clear that we need to crack down hard on the traffickers and dealers who prey upon vulnerable people who suffer from substance abuse and addiction.”**

674 South Oakley Avenue

According to court documents, Columbus Police have been responding to the premises since early 2017 on reports of drug dealing, sexual assault, a stolen vehicle, attempted burglary, and robbery.

Narcotics detectives conducted covert purchases of crack cocaine from the premises on September 17, 2018 and September 24, 2018. On the latter date, officers also encountered a female heroin overdose victim. The following day, police officials sent the property owner's statutory agent a certified letter notifying him of the nuisance criminal activity occurring at the property and his responsibility to abate the issue.

On October 12, 2018 police were dispatched to the premises for a domestic violence incident. Five days later, they responded again and found another overdose victim, who was administered Narcan and transported to a hospital. On November 12, 2018 and February 18, 2019,

undercover detectives conducted covert purchases of heroin. Patrol officers also continued to be dispatched to the premises during this time period.

“We greatly appreciate the court granting the emergency board-up order and want to thank the Columbus Police Division for their diligent work on this case,” said Assistant City Attorney Zach Gwin. “We’ll continue to be aggressive in rooting out the drug activity that’s harming the west side, and neighborhoods all across our city.”

644 Fairwood Avenue

Columbus Police have been responding to this property, which is located within a short walking distance of Fairwood Alternative Elementary School, since at least 2014. The owner/occupants are a mother and son duo who persistently sold crack cocaine from the rear of the house. In 2015, the son, Eugene Ferguson II, was arrested with a sandwich bag of crack. In 2016, the mother, Denise Ferguson, was charged with felony burglary.

On May 22, 2018, narcotics detectives executed a search warrant at the premises, seizing firearms, drugs, and cash. On September 14, 2018 the Franklin County Environmental Court found the premises to be a public nuisance and ordered it closed for seven months after city attorneys filed a complaint against the property. The judge also permanently enjoined the Fergusons from maintaining a nuisance at the premises.

On October 2, 2018 police received a report that Mr. Ferguson was at the premises with a “large gun.” On November 19, 2018 police received a report that a gun had been fired, and “the male [who] fired the gun in the house exited the premises with a baseball bat, and a female exited the house with a fishing rod.”

After a covert purchase of crack cocaine from the back door of the house, narcotics detectives executed a search warrant on February 6, 2019. Officers confiscated cash, weapons, and ammunition. They also encountered at least 10 individuals inside the premises at the time of the raid.

On February 25, March 4, and March 6, 2019 narcotics detectives made covert purchases of crack cocaine from the rear of the premises. Officers subsequently executed another search warrant and seized cash, weapons, including a stolen handgun, ammunition, marijuana, and crack cocaine. Officers also encountered at least 14 people inside the premises.

“It’s troubling to know that this property—with all the weapons, drugs, and violence associated with it—is located within a short walking distance of an elementary school. It’s also just down the road from Nationwide Children’s Hospital,” said Assistant City Attorney Heidi Tawadros. “That’s why it was so important for us to secure an emergency court order shut this place down.”

Hearings for preliminary and permanent injunctive relief against both properties are scheduled for April 15, 2019 at 1:00 p.m.