

Contact: Kristen Dickerson  
Email: [kmdickerson@columbus.gov](mailto:kmdickerson@columbus.gov)

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## City Attorney Continues Aggressive Efforts to Shut Down Drug Havens

*Two more west side properties targeted for board-up*

**COLUMBUS, OH**—Based upon community complaints that led to undercover police investigations, Columbus City Attorney Richard C. Pfeiffer, Jr. announced today that his office filed two more civil motions requesting the board-up of properties known for the purchase, sale, and use of illicit drugs on the city's west side.

647 Belvidere Avenue, located one-tenth of a mile from West Mound Elementary School, was boarded up immediately today after the Franklin County Environmental Court granted the city's request for an emergency temporary restraining order pending a hearing scheduled for 11:00 a.m. on February 17, 2017.

A hearing for preliminary and permanent injunctive relief against the owner of 840 South Hague Avenue, which is located less than a mile from three nearby schools, is scheduled for 11:30 a.m. on February 16, 2017.

If both properties are 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.

**“Filing two cases in one week, coming on the heels of a series of other successful injunctions, shows the seriousness of the drug epidemic,” said City Attorney Richard C. Pfeiffer, Jr. “I want the public to know how important their tips are, especially in these instances, in helping us build strong cases based upon the preponderance of evidence.”**

Following up on community complaints, Columbus Police Division narcotics detectives made covert purchases of heroin on August 5th and crack-cocaine on December 5th and December 7th of last year at the Belvidere Avenue property. Upon executing a search warrant on December 7th, police found cash (including pre-recorded funds used in the undercover purchases), digital scales, crack cocaine, heroin, marijuana, security cameras, and miscellaneous ammunition.

The owners of the property, John and Roberta Mohler, were inside the premises as the search warrant was being executed and signed an on-site letter acknowledging the illegal activity occurring there. The illegal activity continued, however, and police made additional covert purchases of crack cocaine on January 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> of this year. Police executed another search warrant and found more cash, digital scales, crack cocaine, miscellaneous ammunition, a 12-gauge shotgun, and 10 people inside the premises, including Mr. Mohler once again.

Police also had been investigating community complaints of illegal drug activity and prostitution at 840 South Hague Avenue, described in court filings as a “constant nuisance” and “littered with syringes,” for months last year. After making a covert purchase of crack cocaine in October, police executed a search warrant and found a digital scale, a .32 caliber revolver, and live and spent .32 caliber rounds.

The illicit activity continued and actually appeared to intensify after the City Attorney’s office secured a preliminary injunction to board up the house immediately next door at 834 South Hague Avenue for similar nuisance activity.

While the property owner purportedly told detectives that “no one lived” at the property, reports indicated that 20-30 vehicles could be observed coming and going from the premises on a daily basis.

**“I hope these two cases further illustrate to the public how important their community input is in alerting law enforcement to what can be described as harmful malignancies operating in the middle of our neighborhoods,” said Assistant City Attorney Kristen Dickerson. “Once alerted to persistent nuisance activity, our investigators can get to work on the critical task of obtaining substantive evidence we need in court.”**

In order to secure long-term closure of both properties, Dickerson, who is the Zone Initiative Attorney assigned to the west side of Columbus, is seeking to prove that the Mohlers and the owner of 840 South Hague Avenue are guilty of maintaining a nuisance by establishing that they, as owners 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 against 840 S. Hague Ave.](#) and the [court’s board-up order against 647 Belvidere Ave.](#) are available online.

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