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City Attorney Initiative More than Triples Number of Illegal Dumping Prosecutions

Forty-six criminal cases filed in 2020

COLUMBUS, OH—Columbus City Attorney Zach Klein announced today that his office has increased the number of prosecutions for illegal dumping 350 percent this year after assigning an assistant city prosecutor to work directly with investigators from the city’s division of refuse collection and other partner agencies. So far this year, the city has filed 46 criminal cases. In all of 2019, 13 criminal cases were filed.

Starting this past March, Klein appointed Assistant City Prosecutor Christopher C. Clark to work in the *Zone Initiative*, the city attorney’s highly-regarded unit that focuses on neighborhood safety and quality-of-life issues, to begin aggressively prosecuting illegal acts of open and excessive dumping that have long vexed neighborhoods throughout the city. Charges are brought under [Columbus City Code Section 1305](#) and are misdemeanors of the third degree, carrying a maximum penalty of up to 60 days in jail and a \$500 fine.

Defendants also are usually ordered to perform community service as part of their sentence and must complete their required hours through the [Community Cleanup Crew](#), which is administered through the Franklin County Environmental Court with funding from the City of Columbus and Franklin County. Tasks include litter collection, community cleanups, graffiti removal, and special projects to assist local seniors and disabled residents.

“Protecting neighborhoods, promoting equitable justice, and increasing economic opportunity remain our office’s highest priorities—and addressing issues that impact the quality-of-life in our community is such an integral part of all those objectives,” said Klein. **“Columbus residents deserve to live in a clean and safe environment, especially when so many across our city are still working and learning from home due to the coronavirus pandemic. Illegal dumping is more than just an eyesore—it shows disregard for our community and is a drain on critical city resources—and we will work diligently to hold offenders accountable.”**

Stacks of filthy mattresses, discarded hot tubs, construction debris spilling out into alleyways and mounds of trash so large they block entire garages are just a few examples from the tons of

debris left behind by some of the city's worst illegal dumpers. Many are caught on cameras that have been strategically placed by the City of Columbus in dumping hot zones. Others are caught by neighbors or other concerned residents who take photos of the incidents and report them to the city's 311 customer service center.

The bulk of the investigations are performed by solid waste inspectors from the division of refuse collection. They initiate investigations as well as follow-up on community complaints to gather evidence and issue citations. Once the offenders are identified and probable cause is established, the inspectors bring everything associated with the case to the City Attorney's office for prosecutorial review.

Offenders could also face civil sanctions after Columbus City Council passed legislation that went into effect on August 30, 2020. The new ordinance allows the city to file civil complaints against illegal dumpers, seeking up to \$1000 in civil penalties in order to "reimburse the city for a portion of the costs incurred by it in the enforcement of infractions, and for some infractions, the increased costs of solid waste disposal." These civil complaints can be filed in addition to, or separate from, any criminal charges filed against a defendant—depending on the circumstances of the case.

"I want to thank City Attorney Klein for selecting me to serve in this special role as the first prosecutor specifically assigned to work in the *Zone Initiative*," Clark said. "I'm proud to be a part of our office's efforts to help improve the quality-of-life for the residents of our city and I look forward to continuing to work with the many partners, especially the solid waste inspectors from the division of refuse collection, who assist us in successfully prosecuting these cases."

Residents who want to report illegal dumping should contact the city's customer service center by calling 311 or visiting 311.columbus.gov. Reports should be as thorough as possible, including location and description of the issue.

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