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City Attorney Zach Klein Warns of Serious Consequences for Faking COVID-19 Symptoms to Avoid Citation or Arrest

COLUMBUS – Today, Columbus City Attorney Zach Klein issued a clear warning to any individual who attempts to avoid citation or arrest by faking COVID-19 symptoms.

“The overwhelming majority of Columbus residents are taking the threat of coronavirus seriously and doing their part to keep our community safe. However, there have been a few instances where people have exploited this pandemic to avoid arrest,” said City Attorney Klein. “This inappropriate behavior threatens our first responders and wastes time, money, and our scarce personal protective equipment. When charges are filed in these cases, they will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law.”

Those who have serious medical needs will be assisted. However, if a resident fakes COVID-19 symptoms to avoid citation or arrest, they could face a number of charges, including falsification (ORC 2921.12), a first-degree misdemeanor, and/or inducing panic (ORC 2917.31), a first-degree misdemeanor up to a fourth-degree felony.

In one case early Sunday morning, a suspect fleeing the scene of an apparent car break-in on the west side alleged he had COVID-19. The suspect’s claim required Columbus police officers to use their limited personal protective equipment and take extra precautions to keep a safe distance from the suspect. During the incident, the suspect claimed to have difficulty breathing and was flailing on the ground coughing. The situation resulted in an unnecessary run by the Columbus Fire Department, whose medics ultimately determined that the suspect was pretending to exhibit symptoms of COVID-19.

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