

## County files lawsuit against opioid manufacturers

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In 2017, approximately 86 people died of an overdose in DeKalb County. According to county officials, 44 of those deaths were attributed to opioids.

Because of the cost of dealing with opioid addiction, the county has agreed to sue opioid manufacturers to recoup some of the financial losses associated with treating addiction.

“This sends the message that the county is on top of the issue,” said DeKalb County Commissioner Larry Johnson. “We don’t want anyone to die and we’re working on prevention and intervention. We’re alert and proactive and getting on the front end of this issue.”

According to the lawsuit, county officials are experiencing increased costs associated with law enforcement, emergency care, and treatment to help those suffering from opioid abuse.

The county officially filed the lawsuit Dec. 20 and claims opioid manufactures are pushing for patients to be treated with opioids while downplaying the possibility of addiction.

“My goal is to bring awareness to this issue and tell the pharmacies that this is not something we will tolerate. There are other ways to treat legitimate pain,” Johnson said. “This is unacceptable.”

DeKalb County joins other counties such as Fulton, which filed similar lawsuits. Opioid drugs such as OxyContin, Fentanyl and Percocet are at the root of the cause according to the lawsuit.

Last year Johnson held multiple opioid addiction summits to bring awareness to the issue.

“The addiction is having a profound impact on DeKalb County. One death is too many,” Johnson said. “If you have a loved one going through this addiction, find them help. There are ways people can come back and fight this. This is a sickness. It’s not criminal.”

Law Firm Napoli Shkolnik PLLC will be representing government entities during the litigation process, including DeKalb County. Shayna Sacks, a partner with the firm said opioid manufacturers have been dishonest to the public.

The pharmaceutical companies, manufacturers and distributors cannot continue to mislead the public,” said Sacks. “This suit will hold big pharma accountable for the damage they have caused this community.”

In 2017, President Donald Trump declared the opioid epidemic a public health emergency. According to the Georgia Department of Public Health, Georgia ranks in the top 12 of prescription opioid deaths.

“There will be no cost to the DeKalb County taxpayers with this filing. Our office is committed to working with the county in its efforts to combat the devastation these painkillers continue to cause,” said Hunter Shkolnik, a partner with Napoli Shkolnik PLLC.

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