



Prince George's Files Lawsuit Against Opioid Manufacturers

William J. Ford | January 24, 2018

Prince George's County has filed a lawsuit against 26 opioid manufacturers that the county said have created a crisis and addiction among residents.

The suit, announced Wednesday at a press conference at the District Heights Fire Station, alleges these companies knew about the dangers of selling opioids and not being transparent about the risk they could cause.

For instance, fire Chief Benjamin Barksdale said the department has experienced a 260 percent increase since 2014 in its administering of Narcan, a prescribed drug used to reverse opioid overdoses. In addition, he said fire and EMS crews now dispense Narcan nearly three times a day, as opposed to about once a day three years ago.

County Executive Rushern L. Baker III said the suit seeks money to not only relieve resources used by the county public safety and health departments, but also treat those addicted.

“We are talking about an epidemic that is affecting Prince George's County, the state and the nation,” he said. “What we've found in the research is a lot of the pharmaceutical companies misled people. Misled them in the addictive nature of what they were prescribing and overprescribing.”

The county hired Napoli Shkolnik PLLC, a New York City law firm familiar with pharmaceutical cases.

The county doesn't have as serious an opioid problem as other jurisdictions in Maryland such as Baltimore City and Baltimore County. Opioids include the illegal drug heroin and prescribed painkillers such as oxycodone and morphine.

Douglas Mayo, who oversees the emergency departments in three hospitals in the county, said in an interview in October the two main drugs abused in the county are synthetic marijuana and PCP, also known as angel dust, that causes people to hallucinate and alter the awareness of a person's surroundings.

According to the suit, opioid-related deaths in Prince George's increased from 50 in the first six months of 2016 to 63 in the first six months last year. In comparison, Baltimore City increased from 271 to 358 in the same timeframe.

Prince George's officials said opioids are still a problem.

Pamela Creekmur, health officer for the county, said its health department needed a couple million dollars for treatment services to combat opioids.

"There are certain counties across the state where the numbers are much larger, but we are seeing double increases in the last year alone," she said. "It doesn't change the need and impact we have here."

According to the Maryland Department of Health, more than 1,000 opioid-related deaths occurred last year between January and June. Prince George's had the fourth-highest total in opioid-related deaths behind Baltimore City and Baltimore and Anne Arundel counties.

The county's suit claims the drug companies jeopardized lives for the sake of monetary gain.

"This case is about one thing: corporate greed," the suit said. "Defendants put their desire for profits above the health and well-being of Prince George's County consumers at the cost of plaintiff."

[ORIGINAL ARTICLE](#)