



Opioid settlement could bode well for Palm Beach County suit

Chuck Weber Monday, October 21, 2019

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. (CBS12) — Palm Beach County leaders on Monday weighed the fallout from a quarter-billion-dollar settlement in a landmark opioid lawsuit in Ohio.

It was a test case, closely watched across the nation, and potentially a good sign for Palm Beach County's own litigation seeking millions from the pharmaceutical industry.

The nation's three biggest drug distributors and a major drug maker agreed to pay Cleveland's Cuyahoga County, and Akron's Summit County, a total of \$260 million.

Hunter Shkolnik, the attorney who won the settlement for Cuyahoga, is also the lead outside counsel for Palm Beach County in its suit against Big Pharma.

"We think we made the first good step, and we've set a pretty good benchmark, and I can't imagine us asking for less if they're going to wait that long to pay," said Shkolnik, outside the federal courthouse in Ohio.

CBS12 News later reached Shkolnik by phone. He said he's optimistic the settlement will serve as a benchmark for settlements of Palm Beach County's suit, as well as others.

"This is an unprecedented epidemic, and it is something where the people who are responsible for it need to be held accountable," said Palm Beach County's State Attorney Dave Aronberg.

Fighting the war on opioids way before taking his current office, Aronberg said he can't say if the settlement is sufficient to meet the costs expended by the Ohio counties.

But, Aronberg said he hoped it was a good sign for the local suit. Aronberg said he expects a global settlement eventually.

"I'm hoping that the money we get will go to reimburse our local taxpayers for all the out-of-pocket costs, as well as provide treatment for those who remain addicted to this stuff," said Aronberg.

"This epidemic was years in the making," added Aronberg. "It was totally preventable, and it was caused by professional greed and corporate malfeasance."

Walgreens and other pharmacies did not settle Monday with the two Ohio counties, and they're slated to go to trial within six months unless there's an agreement among the other parties.

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