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Cuyahoga County files lawsuit against opioid makers, distributors

By Jay Miller

Cuyahoga County has filed a lawsuit in Cuyahoga County Common Pleas Court against seven firms that it believes were instrumental in promoting opioids for sale and distribution nationally and in Cuyahoga County.

The county is seeking to recoup damages for monies paid for increased health, law enforcement and social services as well as other expenditures required by the opioid epidemic.

The suit names as defendants four drug manufacturers — Purdue Pharma LP, Teva Pharmaceuticals, USA Cephalon Inc. and Janssen Pharmaceuticals — and three distributors — AmerisourceBergen Corp., Cardinal Health Inc. and McKesson Corp. It also names four individuals.

"Cuyahoga County has been hit terribly hard by the opioid epidemic," said county Executive Armond Budish in a news release. "In fact, we are on track to lose almost 800 people this year due to drug overdoses. In 2016, we lost more people to this epidemic than to deaths from homicides, suicides, and auto accidents combined."

The release stated that the county medical examiner's office needed a \$200,000 budget increase this year due to the opioid overdose epidemic. The office needed to hire additional pathologists to avoid exceeding caseload limits set by the National Association of Medical Examiners.

"We need to hold accountable the drug manufacturers and distributors whose corporate strategy was to push these opiates into our community for the sake of profit," said county prosecutor Michael O'Malley. "They are drug pushers on a national level."

Napoli Shkolnik PLLC, a New York City personal injury law firm specializing in opioid lawsuits, is the lead counsel in the suit, assisted by local counsel, Plevin & Gallucci LPA and the Cuyahoga County law department. Napoli Shkolnik is representing the city of Parma in a similar lawsuit filed in August.

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