

County commissioners consider opioid lawsuit

Official: 'epidemic...has no boundaries'



Author: Kelly Whitmire

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Forsyth County may join other counties and cities in taking action against manufacturers of opioids and those who have profited from their sale.

This week, Forsyth County Commissioners heard a presentation from District 91 state Rep. Vernon Jones, of Lithonia, and Shayna Sacks, an attorney

with Napoli Shkolnik PLLC, about filing a lawsuit, though commissioners did not take action at the meeting.

The lawsuit will not be a class action but a local suit in Forsyth County courts and will be filled on contingency.

“The opioid epidemic, as you know, it has no boundaries, no jurisdiction, no gender, no race, no age, no anything,” Jones said. “It’s literally killing people.”

Jones said about 46 state attorneys general were preparing for similar litigation, though local cases will have more control.

“Like the tobacco litigation ... the AGs determined where the funding would go, who would get the funding, who would not get the funding,” Jones said. “Cases are being formed on behalf of local governments themselves so when there is an award, the local government will receive that award and you can determine how you prefer that money to be spent.”

He said municipalities need to file suits ahead of the state to control the funding.

In recent years, opioids and their effects have been a growing issue both nationally and locally, and in October, President Donald Trump declared the crisis a public health emergency.

Sacks gave commissioners a brief rundown of how the drugs affect users.

“The drugs interact with the receptors in the brain; what happens is they attach to the receptors,” she said. “They’re primarily used for pain relief, including anesthesia. These drugs were originally designed for people who were on death’s door.”

Sacks said in 2015, 300 million prescriptions were written for the drugs, “enough for each American adult to get their own bottle of pills,” and Georgia’s numbers were increasing.

She said the nationwide cost of the epidemic is \$55.7 billion in lost productivity through businesses, healthcare costs and criminal justice.

“Basically, the stem of the lawsuit has to do with negligence,” Sacks said. “The pharmaceutical companies, manufacturers and the distributors have a duty to pay attention to what they’re doing; they can’t just sell medication — medication as strong as this — and not have any consequences.”

Commissioners did not take action, but County Attorney Ken Jarrard plans to review the agreement.

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