

With some apprehension, Warren County opts into opioid lawsuit

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QUEENSBURY — Warren County supervisors decided Tuesday to opt in to litigation that targets makers of opioid painkillers, and they took steps to make sure a portion of the money goes to helping first responders who have responded to overdoses and other drug-related issues.

The county board's Finance Committee voted unanimously to hire New York City firm Napoli Shkolnik PLLC, which is handling cases against drugmakers, distributors, "big box" pharmacies and physicians in New York and around the country. The firm was one of three that solicited the county's business.

But not everyone on the county board was enthusiastic about the litigation, questioning what good it will do to address the ongoing heroin addiction crisis.

Should the county win money from the litigation, a number of supervisors agreed that at least some of the proceeds should be put toward assistance for first responders. County leaders are currently trying to reorganize emergency medical response in some parts of the county, but are struggling with a way to pay for it.

Kevin Geraghty, Warrensburg supervisor, acting county administrator and a Warrensburg volunteer firefighter, said a percentage of whatever proceeds the county gets should go to rescue squads, police and other emergency responders who have been called out for innumerable overdoses and other drug-related calls.

"It's a crisis. It affects a lot of people," Geraghty said.

Horicon Supervisor Matt Simpson compared the litigation to the lawsuits against the tobacco industry, which didn't serve to knock the cigarette makers out of business or stop people from tobacco use.

He questioned what, if any, impact it would have on the ongoing opioid addiction epidemic.

"Everybody is getting a piece of the pie, and this isn't going to solve anything," he said.

"I question the litigation, but I think it's something we should do," Hague Supervisor Edna Frasier added.

But Glens Falls 2nd Ward Supervisor Peter McDevitt said the county is clearly among the municipalities that have been "harmed" by the epidemic, and Glens Falls 5th Ward Supervisor Matt MacDonald offered the opinion that "inaction is still an action" as he advocated the county going forward.

"It is one element of trying to go after the opioid addiction problem," said Claudia Braymer, Glens Falls 3rd Ward supervisor.

Napoli Shkolnik will only charge the county if it wins money. McDevitt suggested the county look to see if it can negotiate a lower fee than the 25 percent maximum the firm's contract stipulates.

The firm will send representatives to the county to work with the Department of Social Services, local police and emergency responders to come up with estimated costs for response to opioid use.

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