

DeKalb County sues opioid makers over costs of addiction, deaths

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The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

11:26 a.m. Thursday, Dec. 21, 2017 [DeKalb County](#)

DeKalb County on Wednesday filed suit against opioid manufacturers, distributors and others who allegedly helped mislead the public about [the dangers of the drugs](#).

Deaths from opioids have skyrocketed in the county, as they have across Georgia. From 1999 to 2013, deaths in the state tripled.

“This case is about one thing: corporate greed,” the suit begins. “Defendants put their desire for profits above the health and well-being of DeKalb County consumers at the cost of plaintiff.”

DeKalb officials, like peers in other counties, are suing to get the defendants to reimburse public funds that have been used to fight addiction. The county has seen increased need for law enforcement, emergency care, treatment and more.

Those costs can be traced back to campaigns to mislead doctors and consumers about the addictive nature of drugs, such as OxyContin, Fentanyl and Percocet, and push higher doses, the suit said.

The first defendant listed, OxyContin maker Purdue Pharma, agreed in 2007 to pay \$600 million in fines and payments to resolve federal charges of [“misbranding”](#) the drug. Three former executives of the company pleaded guilty and were ordered to pay more than \$34 million in fines.

In the years that followed, opioids have continued a fatal tear across the country.

"The pharmaceutical companies, manufacturers and distributors cannot continue to mislead the public," Shayna E. Sacks, a partner at the firm representing DeKalb, Napoli Shkolnik, said in a news release. "This suit

will hold big pharma accountable for the damage they have caused this community."

The complaint, which the release said isn't costing taxpayers, is against close to 30 defendants who were involved in misleading the public.

There are defenders of some of the industries accused.

One is John Parker, senior vice president of the Healthcare Distribution Alliance, the trade association representing distributors including AmerisourceBergen, Cardinal Health and McKesson.

"We are deeply engaged in the issue and are taking our own steps to be part of the solution – but we aren't willing to be scapegoats," he said in an emailed statement. "Distributors are logistics companies that arrange for the safe and secure storage, transport, and delivery of medicines from manufacturers to pharmacies, hospitals, long-term care facilities, and others based on prescriptions from licensed physicians. We don't make medicines, market medicines, prescribe medicines, or dispense them to consumers."

DeKalb follows Fulton County, which is [also suing some 30 defendants](#) over the issue using the same law firm.

The defendants are:

- Purdue Pharma
- The Purdue Frederick Company
- Teva Pharmaceuticals
- Cephalon
- Johnson & Johnson
- Janssen Pharmaceuticals
- Endo Pharmaceuticals
- Allergan
- Actavis
- Endo Health Solutions

- Watson Laboratories
- Insys Therapeutics
- McKesson Corporation
- Cardinal Health
- AmerisourceBergen Corporation
- Russell Portenoy
- Perry Fine
- Scott Fishman
- Lynn Webster
- Medicine Center Pharmacy
- Amrac Medical Clinic
- J.M. Smith Corporation
- Vaxserve
- PSS World Medical
- Attain Med
- Bloodworth Wholesale Drugs

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