

Westchester Files Lawsuit Against Big Pharma Over Opioids

The complaint outlines how manufacturers and distributors downplayed the risks associated with opioids while aggressively marketing them.

By [Michael Woyton](#), Patch Staff | Feb 6, 2018 1:33 pm ET | Updated Feb 6, 2018 4:08 pm ET



WHITE PLAINS, NY — As the costs of combating the opioid epidemic increases in Westchester County, officials have filed a complaint Feb. 6 seeking to recover damages for the use of public resources. The complaint includes more than 30 defendants and alleges that the manufacturers, distributors and other entities intentionally misled the public about the dangers of opioids.

The complaint outlines the history of how the manufacturers and distributors — including Purdue Pharma, Teva Pharmaceuticals, Johnson & Johnson and Janssen Pharmaceuticals — downplayed the risks associated with opioids such as OxyContin, Fentanyl and Percocet while aggressively marketing them.

This alleged negligent behavior has led to a significant increase in county budgets for law enforcement, emergency care, first responder overtime, Narcan training and prevention and treatment programs.

There will be no cost to county taxpayers with the filing, a spokeswoman said.

County Executive George Latimer said that too many lives have been lost to opioids and too many Westchester parents have watched their children suffer and die from these drugs.

"It is time that we take a stand and hold the pharmaceutical companies responsible," he said. "These companies clearly knew the risks associated with the use of these products; they needed to build in protections for how they would be used and give proper attention to the likely abuse of their products."

Latimer said the costs of the opioid epidemic have taxpayers' pockets, in addition to education, enforcement and Medicaid costs.

"These costs must be borne instead by those who profited from the sales of these drugs," he said.

Overdoses are now the leading cause of death for Americans under 50, officials said. In 2017, approximately 64,000 people died from drug overdoses in the U.S. — the largest annual increase of drug-related deaths ever recorded in the nation's history.

Westchester experienced 124 opioid overdose deaths, including heroin and prescription drugs, in 2016, according to the state Department of Health.

For the lawsuit, the county is being represented by and is partnering with the firm of [Napoli Shkolnik PLLC](#).

"We are committed to working with the county in their fight against the makers of these dangerous and addictive painkillers," said Paul J. Napoli of Napoli Shkolnik.

The lawsuit demands a jury trial in the matter.