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Westchester Sues Highly Addictive Opioid Manufacturers, Distributors



Jon Craig



Westchester County Executive George Latimer announced a major lawsuit on Tuesday against more than 30 manufacturers and distributors of some highly-addictive, prescription painkillers, while saying "too many lives have been lost to opioids." Photo Credit: *Jon Craig*

Westchester County, facing the ever-escalating costs associated with combating the opioid epidemic, filed a lawsuit on Tuesday against more than 30 parties alleged to manufacture and distribute the highly addictive painkiller.

The county seeks to recover money used fighting the opioid and related heroin crisis in Westchester, the Hudson valley and nationwide.

Westchester suffered 124 known opioid overdose deaths (includes heroin and prescription drugs) in 2016, according to the New York State Department of Health.

The lawsuit alleges that the manufacturers, distributors and other entities intentionally misled the public about the dangers of opioids. The complaint outlines the history of how these defendants downplayed the risks associated with opioids such as OxyContin, Fentanyl and Percocet while aggressively marketing them. This 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 the Westchester County taxpayers with this filing.

County Executive George Latimer said: "Too many lives have been lost to opioids. Too many parents in this County have watched their children suffer and die from these drugs. It is time that we take a stand and hold the pharmaceutical companies responsible. These companies clearly knew the risks associated with 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. They ignored these concerns when promoting these drugs. They are drugs and they are dangerous - and the public must be protected. Further, the costs of this opioid epidemic have been borne by the taxpayers, in additional education, enforcement, and Medicaid costs. These costs must be borne instead by those who profited from the sales of these drugs"

In 2017, about 64,000 people died from a drug overdose in the United States – the largest annual increase of drug-related deaths ever recorded in U.S. history. Overdoses are now the leading cause of death for Americans under the age of 50.

Westchester County Attorney John Nonna of Pleasantville said, : "Westchester County, like many local governments, has expended resources and suffered financial loss addressing the opioid crisis affecting our entire community. We believe that the manufacturers, marketers and promoters of these drugs have misled us as to the addictive power of these drugs in their negligent marketing and misleading promotion of them. They should, and will be, held accountable for this conduct."

Paul J. Napoli of Napoli Shkolnik, the firm the County Attorney's Office has partnered with in this endeavor said: "We are committed to working with the County in their fight against the makers of these dangerous and addictive painkillers."

The Harris Project Founder and President Stephanie Marquesano, (<https://www.theexaminernews.com/health-experts-nonprofit-leaders-tackle-opioid-addiction-at-conference/>) who lost her son Harris to opioids, joined Latimer for the announcement of the lawsuit: "My 19 year-old son Harris died by an accidental opioid overdose in 2013. This propelled me to become an advocate for prevention programming and integrated treatment to meet the needs of those with co-occurring disorders. I work closely with the County to support those facing the challenges of opioid addiction, and see first-hand the catastrophic impact on individuals and loved ones. This is a critical step in turning the tide on this epidemic, and creating long-term solutions."

County Health Commissioner Sherlita Amler, M.D. said: "Westchester and the Nation are in the throes of a new public health crisis, the opioid epidemic, which last year killed more of our people than motor vehicle accidents. Prescription painkillers have actually overtaken heroin as the most common cause of opioid overdose deaths and every measure must be taken to stop this dangerous trend."

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