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Saco the latest Maine community to join lawsuit against opioid makers

By Liz Gotthelf, Journal Tribune • February 8, 2018 10:26 am

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Patrick Sison | AP | BDN

This Aug. 15, 2017 photo shows an arrangement of pills of the opioid oxycodone-acetaminophen in New York.

The city of Saco **has become one of the latest municipalities** to file a lawsuit suing pharmaceutical companies that manufacture and distribute opioids.

The ease with which prescription opioids can be obtained as a result of campaigns by drug companies to make them readily prescribed for common aches and pains has led many people to become addicted to drugs, said Saco City Administrator Kevin Sutherland in a written Saco City Council commentary.

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“Opiate drug companies have enjoyed enormous profits with the sales of opiate drugs, promoting them relentlessly among physicians and paying doctors to promote these drugs at conferences, while failing repeatedly to successfully tailor the drugs to make abuse impossible,” wrote Sutherland.

The city’s fire department responded to 97 suspected illegal or prescription drug overdoses in 2017. The department also administered 55 individual doses of Narcan in that year. More than one dose may have been used on an individual patient, according to the city.

“In order to treat and abate the opioid epidemic, the city has needed to shift resources that could have otherwise been used for various improvements and the general betterment of the city,” wrote Sutherland.

The cities of Saco and Biddeford in a joint effort created the Saco Biddeford Opiate Outreach Initiative with the help of a state grant. Between the end of January 2017 and January 2018, the program’s outreach worker connected with 366 people. Of these, 123 people were placed in treatment.

The Saco City Council voted Monday night to engage the services of law firms Napoli Shkolnik, PLLC of New York City and Trafton, Matzen, Belleau and Frenette of Auburn.

Other municipalities, including **Biddeford**, **Bangor** and **Portland**, have filed similar lawsuits.

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