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Palm Beach County Sues Drugmakers Over Opioid Crisis

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By Katheryn Tucker | April 09, 2018

Palm Beach County has filed an opioid crisis lawsuit against the pharmaceutical industry with help from outside lawyers in Miami and New York.

The [266-page complaint](#)



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(<https://www.law.com/dailyreportonline/sites/dailyreportonline/2018/02/07/alabama-ag-hires-pi-firms-to-sue-big-pharma-over-opioid-crisis/>) filed Thursday in Palm Beach

Circuit Court named 29 defendants and alleges they downplayed the risks associated with their drugs in marketing them.

The Ferraro Law Firm in Miami and New York's Napoli Shkolnik and Stull, Stull & Brody filed suit along with the county attorney's office.

"This case is about one thing: corporate greed," the complaint said. "Defendants put their desire for profits above the health and well-being of Palm Beach County consumers."

The county is seeking to recover damages for use of public resources to fight the opioid crisis.

The lawsuit focuses on the growing problem of people becoming addicted to prescription painkillers, which often escalates to abuse of street drugs such as heroin. Palm Beach County has been recognized as a center of the opioid crisis, in part because of the growth of the drug rehabilitation industry in the region.

With varying degrees of treatment success, the county is ranked fourth in the nation for the number of overdose deaths per 100,000 residents, driving up costs for first responders and the medical examiner's office. Addiction also has driven up the homeless population and overwhelmed the state foster care system with 45 percent of county admissions attributed to parental drug abuse in the first eight months of 2017.

"Palm Beach County spends millions of dollars each year to provide and pay for health care, services, pharmaceutical care and other necessary services and programs on behalf of residents," the lawsuit said.

"It is about time that these defendants answer for the huge adverse economic impact that they have caused and for which they are responsible to the people of Palm Beach County," Jim Ferraro of The Ferraro Law Firm, said in the news release.

"We are moving fast to bring justice to the people of the county who have had to carry this burden for too many years," Hunter J. Shkolnik of Napoli Shkolnik said in the release.

Opioid-related deaths in Palm Beach County have skyrocketed in recent years, the lawyers said. Palm Beach County reported the largest number of heroin overdose deaths in Florida with 268 in 2015 and 552 in 2016. In 2017, the death toll climbed to nearly 600.

The lawsuit resembles others filed in other jurisdictions, many of which have been moved to multidistrict litigation in Ohio federal court. Alabama Attorney General Steve Marshall said after filing a similar complaint

(<https://www.law.com/dailyreportonline/sites/dailyreportonline/2018/02/07/alabama-ag-hires-pi-firms-to-sue-big-pharma-over-opioid-crisis/>) that he expects it to be moved to Cleveland to become part of the MDL.

Purdue Pharma, maker of OxyContin, (<http://www.purduepharma.com/healthcare-professionals/products/oxycontin/>) is named as a defendant in the lawsuits. In an emailed response, the company said it was "deeply troubled by the opioid crisis, and we are dedicated to being part of the solution." Addressing the lawsuit, the statement said, "We vigorously deny these allegations and look forward to the opportunity to present our defense."

Palm Beach County Mayor Melissa McKinlay issued a statement saying the lawsuit was an opportunity to say "enough is enough."

"The thousands of Palm Beach County families struck by this epidemic deserve to hold someone accountable for deceptive, unscrupulous practices involving opioid dispensing, advertising and prescribing," McKinlay said.