

OLEAN TIMES HERALD

Cattaraugus County lawmakers declare heroin/opioid epidemic a nuisance

By TOM DINKI, March 29, 2018

LITTLE VALLEY — The Cattaraugus County Legislature on Wednesday officially declared the county's heroin/opioid epidemic a public nuisance.

Following a public hearing in which no public comments were made, county legislators approved the resolution in hopes of bolstering its chances to recoup money spent fighting the epidemic if it were to join a class-action lawsuit against drug companies.

“We have a huge addiction problem within the county and it's important we take advantage of the opportunity for New York state to go after the pharmaceutical companies who have deceived a lot of doctors as well as patients,” said Minority Leader John Padlo, D-Olean, who sponsored the resolution along with Legislature Vice Chairman Susan Labuhn and David Koch, both Salamanca Democrats.

The measure, which passed 14-0 with one abstention, is titled, “Local Law Declaring the Opioid Epidemic and Its Effects on Cattaraugus County A Public Nuisance and Establishing a Cost Recovery Procedure for the County's Expenditures Incurred in Providing Services Related to the Opioid Epidemic.”

The county has retained a New York City law firm, Napoli Shkolnik, as outside counsel. The firm is also representing Niagara County and several

other New York state counties in a class-action lawsuit alleging drug manufacturers have contributed to the heroin/opioid epidemic by deceptively marketing and overprescribing pain-relieving opioids.

The Legislature's resolution notes there is evidence that approximately four in five heroin users began their addiction by first using and then misusing prescription opioids.

“When you think of the opioid addiction, you think of people buying drugs off the street,” Padlo said, “and that’s certainly a large part of it, but at the same time, the pharmaceutical companies bare some responsibility as well.”

State statistics show 14 Cattaraugus County residents died of heroin/opioid overdoses in both of the last two years, and, according to Cattaraugus County Public Health Director Dr. Kevin Watkins, one has died so far in 2018.

Many others were saved from overdose death by Narcan, the antidote for opioid overdoses. There were 45 reported cases of police, firefighters and paramedics administering Narcan in the county last year and 68 reported cases in 2016, according to data collected by Southern Tier Health Care System Inc.'s free Narcan-distribution program, Southern Tier Overdose Prevention Program, or STOPP.

Battling heroin and opioid addiction cost the U.S. more than \$55 billion last year, including \$1.2 billion in New York state, according to Watkins.

[ORIGINAL ARTICLE](#)