



Councilmembers Debate Joining Opioid Lawsuit

BIVN | April 11, 2019

The Big Island is about to join in a multi-state class action lawsuit on against Big Pharma over the opioid epidemic.

On Wednesday, the Hawai‘i County Council voted to approve Resolution 20-19, authorizing the County to employ a private attorney in litigation against opioid manufacturers “who may be liable to the County of Hawai‘i for the opioid epidemic”, the measure stated.

Any and all compensation to Napoli Shkolnik PLLC and its local counsel, the HI Accident Law Center – the attorneys who will represent Hawai‘i County – would be provided from potential settlement or award amounts, the resolution stated.

Even on final reading, the measure sparked a lively discussion on the council dais.

Councilwoman Valerie Poindexter said that when the measure first came before the council, she was leaning towards not supporting it. But since that time she read up on the issue, and looked into “the pharmaceutical companies and their aggressive marketing campaigns,” she said.

“They made billions of dollars,” Poindexter said. “It was like, profit over patient safety, you know? So, it’s time for them to fork over some of those monies. They made billions ... off of our people. People who have lost their lives.”

“I am on the other side of this,” said Councilman Tim Richards. “I’ve repeatedly asked for information to be brought forth that would convince me otherwise. I don’t disagree there’s an opioid epidemic. What I am concerned about is that we are going for a deep pocket, rather than actually the root of the problem.”

“I guess I’m a little disappointed that Mr. Richards hasn’t gotten information,” said Councilwoman Rebecca Villegas, “but I would love to encourage him. If you just Google it, there’s more information about this issue and the current lawsuits and all the different facts associated with it.”

“This is a national topic, this is a statewide topic, this is an island epidemic,” Villegas said. “We’re seeing one of the largest corruption cases in the state of Hawai‘i

drawing right into – locally, in Hilo – the writing of opioid prescriptions,” referring to the doctor and four employees from the Bade Medical Clinic who are facing charges following an October 2018 grand jury indictment.

Councilmember Richards, a veterinarian who has a license to prescribe opioids, disagreed. He said he has never seen the aggressive marketing in the veterinary world. Also, “Google is not necessarily a totally credible source,” for information, he said.

“The prescriber of the opioid is the end user, and that’s where we need to focus,” Richards said.

Councilwoman Maile David saw the wisdom in both perspectives, and told the council she would be supporting the move to join the class-action lawsuit because “some of the information that Mr. Richards in my mind is trying to obtain in making his decision... is the reason why I believe a class-action lawsuit” is needed.

The council voted to pass the resolution, 6 to 2. Councilmembers Richards and Sue Lee Loy voted “no”, and council Chair Aaron Chung was absent.

[ORIGINAL ARTICLE](#)