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Canyon County considers proposals for opioid lawsuit

By NICOLE FOY nfoy@idahopress.com 20 hrs ago



CALDWELL — At the second of two meetings with national legal groups, Canyon County commissioners continued to discuss the possibility of joining a growing movement of local governments suing prominent pharmaceutical companies for damages caused by the opioid crisis.

Like the previous group, representatives from three law firms told the Canyon County Board of Commissioners Monday that joining other counties and cities in a lawsuit against pharmaceutical companies was a way to recoup losses incurred at county facilities by the opioid crisis.

Two separate groups of lawyers are vying to represent Canyon County in the lawsuit, if the county decides to join.

On Monday, commissioners directed Canyon County Prosecuting Attorney Bryan Taylor to gather official fees and proposals from both groups for a possible decision at the next monthly Canyon County elected officials meeting. The meeting is tentatively scheduled for May 21. A suit could be filed on the county's behalf within 30 days of a decision, according to Colin King, one of the attorneys making a pitch Friday.

Representatives from Boise firm Andersen Schwartzman Woodard Brailsford and two Salt Lake City firms met with the commissioners Monday afternoon. Along with New York-based firm Napoli Shkolnik PLLC, the two Salt Lake City firms are currently representing Summit County in their suit against opioid manufacturers and distributors — the first Utah county to file such a lawsuit in March. Tooele County and Salt Lake County have since followed suit.

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The firm representatives told commissioners that while they had originally worked with law firm Parsons, Behle & Latimer — which has retained former Idaho Supreme Court justice Jim Jones as counsel — Jones and the firm are no longer involved.

In addition to representing Summit and Tooele counties in Utah and dozens of other municipalities across the country, the firms have been retained by Camas and Gooding counties in Idaho. Neither county has filed a lawsuit yet.

On Friday, commissioners and other elected officials met with Dan Chadwick, former director of the Idaho Association of Counties, and attorney Erin Dickinson of Crueger Dickinson LLC. Both presented information on the federal lawsuit led by several national law firms and involving more than 225 counties in 19 states. The consolidated cases — currently targeting prominent opioid creators, such as Purdue Pharma — will play out in district court in Cleveland, Ohio.

While the group including Chadwick and Dickinson would take a 25 percent fee of a successful settlement, the Napoli Shkolnik-led team would take only a 20 percent fee of the net recovery. Both groups would provide a team of lawyers and experts to help Canyon County staff gather evidence and assess damages caused by the opioid crisis to county law enforcement, coroner or health care services.

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