



Media Release

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County, City Joining Forces in Opioid Litigation

Legal Action Intended to Push for Change in Practices

ROCKFORD, Ill. – Winnebago County and The City of Rockford join forces in litigation against pharmaceutical companies and manufacturers to help stem the tide of the growing opioid addiction crisis. City and County officials announced today they intend to pursue legal action against companies they believe helped create and grow the current epidemic. The Winnebago County Board and Rockford City Council are expected to formally approve the action at their next meetings.

“Law enforcement is responding to overdose calls, hospitals are seeing the impact and we’re feeling it across all sectors of our community,” said Winnebago County Board Chairman Frank Haney. “We must take action before this epidemic increases.”

Local, state and federal data show a rapid increase in the number of people addicted to opioids in recent years. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC), the number of heroin users jumped from 404,000 in 2002 to 948,000 in 2016, a 135 percent increase.

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The amount of opioid prescriptions written in the U.S. each year is roughly equal to that of the U.S. population (320 million). The National Institutes of Health also estimates that 64,000 drug overdose deaths occurred in 2016, with 20,000 of those attributed to synthetic opioids.

In Illinois, more people died in 2014 from drug overdoses than homicides or motor vehicle accidents. Locally, Winnebago County saw the number of drug overdose deaths nearly triple in 10 years, from 33 in 2006 to 96 in 2016.

“Data shows that past use of prescription opioids is the strongest risk factor for starting and continuing to use heroin,” said Rockford Mayor Tom McNamara. “Families are being devastated and it’s imperative that drug manufacturers change the way they do business.”

City and County officials maintain that resources are being used to respond to the crisis and that manufacturers and distributors bear the responsibility to help with those costs. They also assert that excessive prescribing to patients was illegal, with companies ignoring measures intended to prevent overprescribing. Now, taxpayers are responsible for shouldering the burden of responding to the crisis.

“Drug manufacturers have strategically, and with questionable intent, marketed and promoted their products,” said Winnebago County State’s Attorney Joe Bruscato. “Drug manufacturers bear responsibility for what many are calling an “epidemic”; therefore they should bear responsibility to solve the tragedies this scourge has caused.”

The City and County have hired a team of experienced attorneys to handle the litigation. Leading the team is Attorney Ann Callis. She is a partner at Goldenberg Heller Antognoli, P.C. which is a law firm based in Edwardsville, Illinois. Ms. Callis has experience in Mass Tort litigation targeting pharmaceutical companies. She also served as a Judge for 18 years, which includes 7 years as a felony trial Judge and 7 years as Chief Judge. Another lead attorney handling the case is Peter Mougey. He is a shareholder with Levin, Papantonio, Thomas, Mitchell, Rafferty & Proctor. Mr. Mougey is recognized as one of Florida’s top 100 trial lawyers, a Florida Super Lawyer in securities litigation, Florida Trends Legal Elite, and the former President of the national securities bar association Public Investors Arbitration Bar Association (PIABA).

The litigation will be filed and commence in U.S. District Court.

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