

Alabama files lawsuit against opioid manufacturer

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Alabama on Tuesday filed a lawsuit against the manufacturer of OxyContin and other opioids, becoming the latest state seeking to hold drug companies accountable for an addiction epidemic.

Alabama Attorney General Alabama Steve Marshall filed the lawsuit in Montgomery federal court against Purdue Pharma, L.P. and its branches. The lawsuit claims the manufacturer created a deceptive marketing campaign that misled patients about the benefits of the drugs and the risks of addiction.

"The opioid epidemic has devastated Alabama families, leaving a trail of addiction and death winding through every community of this state," Marshall said in a statement.

"It will take years to undo the damage but an important first step we must take is to hold the parties responsible for this epidemic legally liable for the destruction they have unleashed upon our citizens."

Marshall said he anticipates the lawsuit will eventually be transferred to Ohio where multi-district litigation is ongoing. The Alabama attorney general attended the start of settlement talks in that litigation last week.

At least 13 states have filed lawsuits against opioid manufacturers.

Alabama ranks first in the nation in the number of painkiller prescriptions per capita. Alabama had more than 5.8 million opioid

prescriptions written in 2015. That equates to a rate of 1.2 prescriptions per person, the highest rate in the country. By comparison, the national per capita was 0.71 in 2015.

Marshall's office estimated that 30,000 Alabamians over age 17 are dependent upon heroin and prescription painkillers.

John Puskar, director of public affairs for Purdue Pharma L.P., said the company vigorously denies the allegations in the state's lawsuit.

"We are deeply troubled by the prescription and illicit opioid abuse crisis, and are dedicated to being part of the solution. As a company grounded in science, we must balance patient access to FDA-approved medicines, while working collaboratively to solve this public health challenge," Puskar said in a statement.

He said the company has distributed the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guideline for prescribing opioids for chronic pain, developed three of the first four FDA-approved opioid medications with abuse-deterrent properties and partnered with law enforcement to ensure access to naloxone, a drug that reverses overdoses.

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