



Nebraska Becomes the Sole State Not Pursuing Opioid Cases Against Drug Makers

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Nebraska Attorney General Doug Peterson has used public education campaigns in order to fight prescription opioid abuse. He has worked with lawmakers to tighten prescribing practices to limit the number of patients exposed to these potent painkillers. He has demanded documents from the maker of OxyContin, Purdue Pharma. He also said that the overdose crisis is ravaging families.

The only thing Peterson hasn't yet pursued is a lawsuit seeking to hold any opioid manufacturer, distributor or pharmaceutical company accountable for the epidemic. In fact, the Nebraska attorney general is now the only one remaining that has not filed this type of lawsuit against drug companies.

Every other state has filed lawsuits, filed administrative charges, or promised to sue the likes of Purdue Pharma, Teva Pharmaceutical, Johnson & Johnson, and others. There are now thousands of lawsuits all across the United States, placing blame on the opioid makers for allegedly playing a role in the opioid crisis.

Right now, Peterson doesn't plan on holding any opioid manufacturer, distributor, or pharmaceutical company accountable. His decision to stand on the sidelines, at least so far, has frustrated some who want to

make sure that Nebraska is in line to receive its fair share of money under any national settlement.

From 2000 to 2017, more than 390,000 Americans have died due to opioid-related overdose. Most state attorneys general have claimed that opioid makers used misleading marketing methods in order to downplay the addictive properties of their opioid products.

"We as a state have been great and our attorney general has been wonderful in recognizing the opioid problem," said state Sen. Sara Howard of Omaha. Howard's sister died of an overdose in 2009. "It's really baffling to me why we haven't joined (the lawsuits)."

Howard sent a letter to Peterson urging him to join a group of some 1,500 opioid-related lawsuits from around the country that are consolidated under a federal judge in Ohio. So far she has received no response. She said that Nebraska has more work to do and that she would like drug companies to pay for treatment and prevention programs. Every day, over 130 Americans die due to opioid overdose.

Suzanne Gage, spokeswoman for Peterson said in a statement that state lawyers talk regularly with private attorneys and other states that have filed opioid-related lawsuits. Gage would not rule out future legal action but declined to say why the state has not yet proceeded with its own claim.

48 states have sued to recover damages they say are caused by the opioid crisis. Michigan's attorney general has announced her intention to sue and has solicited bids from outside law firms to handle the case.

It is worth noting that Nebraska had the lowest opioid-related death rate in 2017. Advocates say that addictions to alcohol and meth are more pervasive. Still, tribal and local government officials say opioid abuse has led to a rise in law enforcement and public health costs. Several of them have filed their own lawsuits.

The Ponca Tribe, for example, sued Purdue Pharma last year, along with other pharmaceutical companies. The state's three other tribes quickly joined.

"We have a responsibility to make sure we're protecting the health of our citizens and being proactive wherever we can," said Larry Wright Jr., the Ponca tribe's chairman.

Five Nebraska counties have also filed lawsuits, as did South Sioux City. The Douglas County lawsuit claimed that the epidemic has saddled officials with "an enormous economic burden" and led to more crime and children in foster care.

Purdue Pharma is facing more than 2,000 lawsuits from the state, local, and tribal governments. Click the link

to see Miami's top rehab placement programs.

"From a lawyer's standpoint, it seems to me you'd be in a better position if you have a lawsuit on file and are engaged in the litigation process," said Ed Hotz, one of the attorneys representing Douglas County. "But maybe the attorney general has his reasons. I'm just not sure what they are."

So far, Peterson has taken an active role in trying to address the opioid epidemic, even without suing.

Previously, he said: "We are joining forces to work together in protecting Nebraskans from the harmful impacts of addiction and the ravages it can cause to families and futures. Nebraskans are not immune to this problem. We all need to work together and do something about it."

It is not clear whether a government entity that does not sue could miss out on a nationwide settlement with the opioid industry or individual companies. Right now it is not certain that there will eventually be a settlement.

If someone in the family is struggling with opioid or alcohol addiction, it is important to seek help. A combination of medical detox and behavioral therapy can go a long way in the fight against drug abuse. But because every individual is affected by addiction differently, a comprehensive program tailored to their specific needs is necessary. Look for a nearby addiction treatment facility today and find out how drug treatment programs work.

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