



NEWS RELEASE

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Everett files lawsuit against Purdue Pharma City aims to hold company accountable for opioid crisis in Everett

EVERETT – The Everett City Council Wednesday unanimously approved Mayor Ray Stephanson’s request to authorize a civil lawsuit against Purdue Pharma for allowing OxyContin to be funneled into the black market, causing the current opioid crisis in Everett. The City is represented by the firm of Kelley, Goldfarb, Huck, Roth & Riojas, PLLC, which filed the complaint in Snohomish County Superior Court Thursday morning.

“There is clear evidence that Purdue ignored their responsibility to stop the diversion of OxyContin into the black market, directly leading to the heroin crisis on our streets today,” said Stephanson. “Their drive for profit caused this epidemic, which has overwhelmed our treatment and emergency systems. We are taking a stand, and holding Purdue accountable for their actions.”

The lawsuit seeks to hold Purdue responsible for “knowingly, recklessly, and/or negligently supplying OxyContin to obviously suspicious physicians and pharmacies and enabling the illegal diversion of OxyContin into the black market, including to drug rings, pill mills and other dealers for dispersal of the highly addictive pills in Everett.”

OxyContin is recognized as a gateway drug for heroin, and in addition to OxyContin abuse, Everett is also dealing with a current heroin crisis throughout the community.

The City has been focused for the past three years on addressing street-level social issues, including addiction and homelessness. The City and its community partners have made progress in implementing the City’s Safe Streets plan, a comprehensive, balanced approach that includes housing, enforcement and outreach, and diversion. But significant additional resources are needed to address the full scope of this growing problem.

“Our systems have been overwhelmed by this crisis, and our community lacks the capacity to respond to and treat the individuals who are suffering from addiction in Everett,” said Hil Kaman, public health and safety director. “Every City department is dealing with the effects of rampant drug use on our streets, and our neighborhoods and business owners feel the impact as well. Purdue must take responsibility for the devastating consequences of their negligence.”

Purdue has pled guilty in the past to using deceptive marketing practices and has settled with several states, including Washington. The City's lawsuit highlights Purdue's failure to comply with clear regulations – as well as a 2007 consent agreement with Washington State – that required them to monitor suspicious orders and notify authorities if they suspected illegal activity.

“Purdue placed profit over the health and safety of our community, and we can see the tragic results of that decision throughout Everett,” said Stephanson. “We've already invested significant taxpayer dollars to deal with impacts of opioid addiction in our city, and we know that substantial additional resources will be needed to deal with this crisis in the coming years.”

As the lawsuit describes, “The cost to remedy and remediate the extensive damage inflicted on Everett by Purdue is enormous. For example, significant and substantial sums are required to fund addiction treatment, detox and rehabilitation facilities, social services and housing, and prevention and education programs. Additional sums are also needed for law enforcement, diversion programs, and emergency medical services.”

A full copy of the lawsuit is available at www.everettwa.gov/purdue. To learn more about the City's Safe Streets plan, or to sign up for email updates, visit www.everettwa.gov/safestreets.

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