



Opioids and the Courts News: Mar. 29, 2019

National

[OxyContin maker Purdue reaches \\$270 million settlement in Oklahoma opioid case: source](#)

Reuters

OxyContin maker Purdue Pharma LP and members of the wealthy Sackler family that own the company reached a \$270 million settlement to resolve a lawsuit brought by the state of Oklahoma accusing the drugmaker of fueling an opioid abuse epidemic.

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Under the terms of Tuesday's settlement, Purdue will contribute \$102.5 million to help fund an addiction treatment center at [Oklahoma State University], and donate \$20 million worth of medications to support its treatment mission.

The Sacklers, who were not named as defendants in Oklahoma's lawsuit, agreed to contribute \$75 million toward the university center as well.

Another \$12.5 million will be made available to Oklahoma localities to help address the opioid epidemic in their communities, and another \$60 million will go toward costs and legal fees stemming from the lawsuit.

National

[What OxyContin-maker's settlement with Oklahoma may signal about thousands of lawsuits being heard in Ohio](#)

Cleveland.com

Attorneys and experts involved and observing the litigation, one of the largest in the nation's history, spent Tuesday deliberating about what the settlement means for the future of the lawsuits, especially as Purdue Pharma continues to deliberate on whether it should file for bankruptcy.

The settlement "signals there's blood in the water now," University of Georgia law professor Elizabeth Chamblee Burch said. She said Tuesday's news may lead to a "feeding frenzy" as cities, counties and states try to ensure they can still get money from Purdue Pharma.

"Now the concern is, if somebody is threatening bankruptcy, if you are the last one to settle, there may be nothing left," Burch said.





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National

[Local jurisdictions pay the price for nation's opioid crisis](#)

Associated Press

As the nation's opioid crisis has devastated thousands of families, it also has taken a crippling financial toll on cities, small towns and counties around the country.

Packed jails, increased ambulance runs, and overworked coroners, sheriff's deputies and public defenders are just some of the consequences of the massive epidemic that has forced localities to divert millions of dollars to overdose-related emergencies and addiction treatments. That cost was acknowledged this week in a settlement between OxyContin maker Purdue Pharma and the state of Oklahoma, a settlement that included \$12.5 million for local governments.

But is it enough?

Government officials around the country who have lawsuits pending against the opioid industry said the amount in the Oklahoma settlement was just a fraction of what they need.

Hunter Shkolnik, a lawyer representing at least five Oklahoma counties in opioid-related lawsuits, said he expects his clients will avoid asking for a piece of the settlement because taking the money would mean giving up on their own claims against Stamford, Connecticut-based Purdue Pharma.

"The amount that they're offering is woefully inadequate," he said.

Most of the \$270 million Oklahoma settlement — about \$200 million — announced Tuesday will fund a university drug treatment and research center.

Montana

[Montana lawmakers find more money for drug treatment courts](#)

Billings Gazette

Drug courts are effective tools in the state's fight against substance abuse, proponents say. But they need more money.

HB 654, carried by Rep. Zach Brown, D-Bozeman, would allow the courts to expand their reach over the next two years with an extra \$2.3 million, or nearly double what the state currently spends.

The bill has seen plenty of changes in its first week in play at the Legislature, but Brown was optimistic after it passed out of committee Monday.

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“It’s one-time-only funding, so it’s disappointing we couldn’t come up with a longer-term funding solution,” Brown said. “But it’s a significant positive step.”

New Hampshire

[Lethal liftoff: How fentanyl entered NH's heroin crisis — and eclipsed it](#)

The Keene Sentinel

Fentanyl began for many as a heroin alternative in a drug-screening blind spot.

“People were seeking out fentanyl...because it was more potent than heroin, but also...nobody was testing for it, so they knew that they [could] get away with that,” [statewide coordinator for drug court programs Alex] Casale said.

That window before drug testing caught up likely made fentanyl more popular. At one point within that gap, Casale recalled, a man who was participating in drug court landed in the hospital for what appeared to be pneumonia. The hospital sent the court regular drug tests, all of them registering negative. But when the man wasn’t getting better, court staff decided to test for fentanyl.

That test came back positive, Casale said.

The drug court program statewide began tracking fentanyl in drug screens in 2015. About two years later, Phoenix House in Keene also added fentanyl to its screenings, according to Amelie Gooding, senior program director at the drug rehabilitation facility.

New York

[Montgomery County to host pilot Opioid Court program](#)

The Daily Gazette

To address the issue of opioid-addicted people flooding the justice system, the New York State Unified Court System has begun establishing special Opioid Stabilization Courts, and Montgomery County has been chosen to be the seat of the first pilot Opioid court for New York’s 4th Judicial District.

Montgomery County Court Judge Felix Catena said he’s been asked to preside over the new court, which he has been in the process of setting up over the last several weeks.

“Essentially, what this is like an emergency room for the court system,” Catena said in an interview last week with The Daily Gazette. “In a nutshell, the way it works is, because of the problem of heroin abuse and opiate [and opioid] abuse and opiate overdose and heroin overdose and fentanyl — we have people who are affected by this and people who are dying; around the country, they’re coming up with different treatment courts in an attempt to come up with a solution for the problem, to at least, at a minimum, save lives.”

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North Carolina

[Surry seeks to start drug court](#)

Mount Airy News

[County opioid response director Mark] Willis said the Department of Justice announced [on] Feb. 14 a new program: the Bureau of Justice adult drug court grant.

“This \$95 million federal grant will provide financial and technical assistance to states, state courts and local courts for the development and implementation of drug courts,” Willis told the commissioners.

Willis later explained that these tools have been around for more than 20 years. Now there are some 3,000 drug courts across the country in various forms; in this state they are commonly called recovery courts.

Tennessee

[Shelby County Drug Court celebrates graduates at 250th graduation](#)

The Daily Memphian

The possibility of more funding to expand recovery courts like his is welcome news to [General Sessions Criminal Court Judge Tim] Dwyer, who helped start Shelby County’s drug court in 1997.

“If we got additional money, one of the first things that we would do is do something about the heroin epidemic that we see,” Dwyer said. “We have seen a 20 percent increase in these cases in drug court since 2014.”

Heroin and other opioids account for the largest percentage of drug use among drug court participants, at 41 percent.

