

Press Release

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SAFE Glen Cove Coalition: Opioid Epidemic- Florida Sues Walgreens & CVS

An article appearing in this month's Nassau County Department of Human Services newsletter discusses the state of Florida's law suit against Walgreens and CVS, the nation's two largest drugstore chains, over opioid sales.

The state is alleging the drugstore chains added to Florida, as well as the national opioid crisis, by overselling painkillers and not taking precautions to stop illegal sales. Florida Attorney General Pam Bondi announced that she has added the companies to a state court lawsuit filed last spring against Purdue Pharma, the maker of OxyContin, and several opioid distributors maintaining that CVS and Walgreens played a role in creating the opioid crisis by failing to stop suspicious orders of opioids and dispensed unreasonable quantities of opioids from their pharmacies.

On average, about 45 people die nationally each day because of opioid overdoses, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Bondi will continue to pursue those companies that played a role in creating the opioid crisis as thousands of Floridians have suffered as a result of the actions of the defendants. Until a law enforcement crackdown at the beginning of the decade, Florida was known for its so-called pain mills. Drug dealers from throughout the country would send associates to store-front clinics where unscrupulous doctors would write opioid prescriptions for bogus injuries and illnesses. At one point, 90 of the nation's top 100 opioid prescribers were Florida doctors, according to federal officials. After receiving the prescriptions, the phony patients would buy the pills from Florida pharmacies — state law says pharmacists must refuse to fill prescriptions they suspect are not for a valid purpose. Most of the opioids would then be taken out of state to be resold illegally at huge markups, creating a drug crisis in many communities throughout the Eastern United States.

According to the lawsuit, Walgreens has dispensed billions of opioid dosages from its Florida pharmacies since 2006. The Illinois based chain is the nation's largest drugstore chain and has more than 13,200 stores globally. The company distributed 2.2 million opioid tablets from its store in Hudson, a Tampa-area town of 12,000, and in one unidentified town of 3,000, sold 285,000 pills in a month, the lawsuit says. In some stores, its opioid sales jumped six-fold in two years. The company paid \$80 million five years ago to resolve a federal investigation that centered on inadequate record keeping of its Florida opioid sales that allowed the pills to reach the black market. Florida's accusations against CVS were

more general, saying it sold 700 million opioid dosages between 2006 and 2014, including outsized sales in Hudson and two other nearby towns. The Rhode Island-based chain has more than 9,800 stores.

Florida's lawsuit comes at a time when more than 1,000 state and local governments across the U.S. are pursuing civil cases against opioid-makers and distributors. Last month, U.S. Magistrate Judge David Ruiz in Cleveland recommended that a major test case, called Bellwether, be allowed to move forward in federal court next year and could shape how opioid lawsuits are handled by courts nationwide. At least three state-level lawsuits are also expected to go to trial in 2019.

The Nassau County Department of Human Services provides the residents of Nassau County with a constituent centered and holistic approach to the delivery of services and information through and between its Office for the Aging, Office of Mental Health, Chemical Dependency, and Developmental Disabilities Service, Office for the Physically Challenged, and Office of Youth Services. The department facilitates the sharing and exchange of knowledge, skill, and professionalism in a comprehensive and integrated manner. Additionally, the Department of Human Services works closely with, and enjoys a collaborative relationship with many non-profit and community-based organizations throughout the county. For more information please visit www.nassaucountyny.gov.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is a federal agency that conducts and supports health promotion, prevention and preparedness activities in the United States, with the goal of improving overall public health. For more information please visit www.cdc.gov.

SAFE, Inc. is the only alcohol and substance abuse prevention, intervention and education agency in the City of Glen Cove. Its Coalition is conducting an opioid prevention awareness campaign entitled, "Keeping Glen Cove SAFE," in order to educate and update the community regarding opioid use and its consequences. To learn more about the SAFE Glen Cove Coalition please follow us on www.facebook.com/safeglencovecoalition or visit SAFE's website to learn more about the Opioid Epidemic at www.safeglencove.org.