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## **Snohomish County Files Lawsuit to Hold Purdue and Others Accountable**

*County has significant evidence of misconduct*

**EVERETT, Snohomish County, January 28, 2019**—Today, the Snohomish County Council—with the support of the Snohomish County Prosecuting Attorney, Snohomish County Executive, and Snohomish County Sheriff—unanimously voted to file a civil lawsuit against Purdue Pharma, makers of Oxycontin, and McKesson Pharmaceutical, distributors of Oxycontin and other opioids, as well as others. The lawsuit asserts that Purdue, McKesson, and others caused significant harm to Snohomish County by, among other things, recklessly ignoring criminal activity and pursuing corporate interests over the interests of our residents.

“Opioids are a menace to public safety and our families,” said Terry Ryan, Chair of the Snohomish County Council. “This lawsuit is our way of holding these companies accountable to our residents. Nothing can bring back sobriety or peace of mind, but this can help to ensure that other communities won’t be harmed in the future.”

“We see the suffering caused by opioid addiction in our criminal justice system, our neighborhoods, and our schools,” said Adam Cornell, Snohomish County Prosecuting Attorney. “By filing this civil lawsuit, we are trying to force these companies to take responsibility for their reckless actions. That is the surest path for protecting our community and others like us.”

“The devastation of the opioid epidemic has been felt in every corner of our county and region,” said Dave Somers, Snohomish County Executive. “This lawsuit is an important step in making amends for the damage done to our neighbors and family members by this predatory behavior.”

This lawsuit seeks to hold all of the defendants accountable for 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 Snohomish County. The vast majority of doctors, pharmacists, and clinicians have partnered with the county on responsible use of opioids. However, a few bad actors have caused significant harm.

Oxycontin has been identified as one of the primary contributors to opioid addiction and a common first step on a pathway to heroin and fentanyl addiction.

“One out of every three inmates booked in our jail is immediately placed on an opioid withdrawal watch,” said Ty Trenary, Snohomish County Sheriff. “The nexus between opioid misuse, addiction and criminal activity is clear. It’s time to hold those who have been irresponsibly dumping large quantities of powerful and highly addictive narcotics into our communities responsible.”

“We have had to spend significant resources to address the public health and public safety impacts of opioid addiction,” said Nate Nehring, Vice Chair of the Snohomish County Council. “My hope is that with

the help of today's action, families can avoid the pain and suffering of having a loved one become addicted to opioids."

The lawsuit details numerous examples of defendants' misconduct, including based on internal Purdue and McKesson emails and other documents. For example, the complaint chronicles a drug ring in the Los Angeles area engaged in a pattern of transparently false OxyContin orders, for the purpose of distributing OxyContin on the black market and into Snohomish County. Despite knowledge, Purdue and McKesson took no action and instead they continued to supply massive and disturbing quantities of OxyContin to the drug ring until it was ultimately shut down by law enforcement. The complaint also describes how the misconduct of local physicians, clinics, and pharmacies resulted in dangerous quantities of OxyContin being illegally diverted into Snohomish County.

"This lawsuit is about the health and safety of our community," said Stephanie Wright, Snohomish County Councilmember. "These companies chose to profit from the suffering of so many people in our county, and we are going to hold them accountable."

"Across the region, we've seen too many lives lost and broken from opioid addiction," said Brian Sullivan, Snohomish County Councilmember. "For these companies that have preyed on the most vulnerable in our community, there needs to be an accounting. Our action today will ensure they pay a price."

"We are filing this lawsuit on behalf of every family member who suffers from opioid addiction and our residents who have had to bear the burden of crime and disorder brought on by addiction," said Sam Low, Snohomish County Councilmember. "It is clear from the evidence that our opioid epidemic was not a random natural event but instead a calculated attempt to victimize our residents."

In November of 2017, Executive Somers activated the emergency management system to address the opioid crisis in Snohomish County. With Sheriff Trenary and the Snohomish Health District, the Multi-Agency Coordination (MAC) Group was established to better coordinate the county's response to the crisis. This innovative approach has allowed for a regional approach and the achievement of common goals. The MAC Group work has allowed for a more efficient use of resources, an elimination of unnecessary redundancies, and a better understanding of the impact the crisis has on the county. Some of the key accomplishments of the MAC Group include reducing the Medical's Examiner's wait time for toxicology results in overdose deaths, training more than 800 people to use Naloxone (Narcan) to reverse an overdose, and increasing the number of medical providers who prescribe Suboxone (a medication-assisted treatment for opioid addiction) by 10 percent.

Through today's filing, the county seeks to hold all of the defendants accountable for their callous and unconscionable practices and prevent them from evading responsibility for the damage inflicted on our community.

To learn more about Snohomish County's response to the opioid epidemic, visit <https://snohomishoverdoseprevention.com>.

## **[Complaint filed](#)**

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