

# Dane County: Wisconsin's Largest Counties Hire Same Firm In Opioid Lawsuit

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Today, Dane County Executive Joe Parisi and the Dane County Board of Supervisors announced that Dane County has hired a team of attorneys to assist the County in filing a federal lawsuit against the pharmaceutical drug manufacturers and wholesale drug distributors for their role in causing and fueling the opioid epidemic in the Dane County community.

The County has hired expert law firms, experienced in holding the powerful pharmaceutical industry accountable. Those firms include: Baron & Budd; Levin, Papantonio, Thomas, Mitchell, Rafferty & Proctor; Greene Ketchum Bailey Farrell & Tweel; Hill, Peterson, Carper, Bee & Deitzler; and McHugh Fuller Law Group. Baron and Budd serves as lead counsel to approximately 80 percent of the municipalities that have filed suit against pharmaceutical distributors for opioid-related claims including Milwaukee County.

“The opioid epidemic has hit local communities hard across the United States, and Dane County is no exception,” said County Executive Joe Parisi. “This epidemic has strained our resources and has cost local communities across Wisconsin millions of dollars as we try to get people the treatment and recovery they so desperately need.”

After today’s announcement, Baron & Budd and their team will work with Dane County to file a federal lawsuit in the coming months.

“The elected leaders of Dane County are taking an important step forward by going on the offense against the manufacturers and distributors of highly addictive,

dangerous prescription opioid drugs,” said Baron & Budd Shareholder, Burton LeBlanc. “Dane County understands that significant resources will be needed to provide treatment for addiction, education and law enforcement to combat the opioid epidemic. I’m proud to be leading this team and intend to hold these manufacturers and distributors responsible for the widespread damage they have caused in this community.”

Prescription opioids have become exceedingly prevalent in the Dane County community. According to the Prescription Drug Monitoring Program, more than **300,000** prescriptions for opioids have been dispensed to Dane County residents annually since 2013. On average, 21 million opioid pills are dispensed to Dane County residents per year. That equates to over 39 opioid pills being prescribed to each of Dane County’s approximately 531,000 residents every 12 months.

“Aggressive and inappropriate marketing by large pharmaceutical companies has led to misuse of opioids,” said Dane County Board Supervisor Mary Kolar. “Medication meant for short term use was pushed by the manufacturers for long term use. We must hold these corporations accountable for the tragic results of addiction, including death, that they made billions of dollars from.”

Dane County EMS agencies administered 701 doses of narcan in 2016 and this increased to 901 administrations in 2017. A total of 13 opioid involved deaths occurred in 2000, but that number skyrocketed to 85 in 2016. According to Public Health of Madison and Dane County, the rate of prescription opioid involved deaths in Dane County has doubled since 2000, from 6.3 per 100,000 people in 2000 to 12.4 per 100,000 people in 2016. The rate of heroin involved deaths has more than tripled since 2000, from 3.0 per 100,000 people in 2000 to 10.1 per 100,000 people in 2016.

Dane County is working hard to combat this growing epidemic. One program that is funded in part by the county and guides people into immediate treatment shortly after experiencing a medical emergency from a heroin overdose is the ED2Recovery Program. County Executive Parisi included \$15,000 in his 2017 Dane County budget to help Safe Communities fund this endeavor. The ED2Recovery Program empowers those in recovery, called recovery coaches, by having them support and guide those who have just survived an overdose through the process of seeking long-term treatment.

Overall, Dane County has allocated a significant amount of resources to help those struggling with opioid addiction. Approximately \$7.5 million made up Dane County's 2017 Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Prevention and Treatment budget. There was \$733,000 in grant revenue from the state and federal governments that specifically provided treatment to those using opiates and using drugs intravenously in Dane County's 2017 budget. Of the Dane County residents receiving county-funded treatment, 30 percent were seeking treatment for problems with using opiates.

In the County Executive's 2017 budget he allocated funding for a permanent opiates counselor position to assist with deferred prosecutions in the District Attorney's (DA's) Office due to an increase in cases. Dane County spends \$230,000 on this program.

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