

Milwaukee County Supervisor West: Time to hold drug makers accountable

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MILWAUKEE – County Supervisor Peggy A. West expressed her support today for action taken by the county’s top lawyer, Corporation Counsel Margaret Daun, to sue drug manufacturers and distributors for their role in the opioid epidemic that has severely impacted Milwaukee. Daun announced the county’s lawsuit at a noon press conference.

Supervisor West released the following statement:

“I fully support Corporation Counsel Daun and the lawsuit she has brought on behalf of Milwaukee County, to hold accountable the pharmaceutical drug manufacturers and wholesale drug distributors that made the opioid epidemic possible, and I applaud her efforts.

“I know the needless pain and suffering caused by this epidemic, because I have experienced it first hand as a family member of someone who overdosed. Like many I’ve turned my frustration into activism by working with community groups such as MKE Heroin Diaries to raise awareness about opioid addiction and push for more resources to address the problem.

“Education, prevention and treatment are important but we also have a responsibility to recover the damages to our community. The opioid epidemic did not just happen – it is the predictable result of unethical companies choosing to put their profits before the health and safety of the public.

“We know which companies bear some responsibility for the opioid epidemic: they are the drug manufacturers and distributors that knowingly pushed their unsafe product onto consumers who were in legitimate pain, and onto doctors who wanted to ease their patient’s suffering.

“As chair of the County Board’s Finance and Audit Committee, I have also seen the staggering financial cost that the opioid epidemic has had on Milwaukee County. Just this year we added more than one million dollars to our Medical Examiner’s budget but it is not enough and we can barely keep up.

“In 2017, Milwaukee County nearly surpassed the limit on how many autopsies we could perform before losing our full accreditation. Losing our accreditation could create enormous risk for the county, and that is unacceptable to me as a county supervisor.

“If Milwaukee County does recover any of our costs from opioid manufacturers, distributors, or others, that money should be spent directly on county services that have been strained as a result of the crisis, including everything from AODA treatment to a new facility for the Medical Examiner’s office, which is outdated and crumbling.”

The Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors approved Corporation Counsel Daun’s request to seek outside counsel and prepare for a lawsuit against “any pharmaceutical company, wholesale distributor, manufacturer, and/or other entity that engages in practices that contribute to the ongoing opioid epidemic within Milwaukee County” in November.