

Attorney General Hunter Refiles Lawsuits against Three Leading Opioid Distributors

DURANT – Attorney General Mike Hunter today filed separate lawsuits against three leading opioid distributors for their alleged role in the ongoing opioid crisis.

Originally filed in Cleveland County as one case, the state has filed three separate lawsuits and changed the venue as part of its legal strategy. The move to Bryan County District Court better represents the overwhelming number of overdose deaths and ongoing addiction crisis in the state's rural communities.

The state alleges the three companies, AmerisourceBergen Corp., Cardinal Health and McKesson, fueled the nation's opioid crisis by supplying massive and unreasonable quantities of opioids to communities throughout Oklahoma.

Attorney General Hunter said greed led to the companies' decisions to ignore their duties against oversupply and diversion.

"By law, opioid distributors are required to stop suspicious

shipments of opioids and report them to law enforcement," Attorney General Hunter said. "These companies ignored their responsibilities because they were making billions of dollars, while Oklahomans, especially those in our rural communities, suffered. Even after warnings and paying hundreds of millions in settlements and fines for their irresponsible behavior, the companies persisted. We must hold them accountable for this behavior and for the deaths and continued suffering that occurred from their actions."

In 2017, enough opioids were dispensed to Bryan County residents for every adult to have the equivalent of 144 hydrocodone 10 milligram tablets. Between 2006 and 2014, there were 24.1 million pain pills supplied to Bryan County. The three companies were responsible for supplying nearly 70% of those pills.

Bryan County is within a cluster of the rural communities hardest hit by the opioid epidemic in the state. Among those counties, Bryan County has the resources to best handle a trial of this magnitude.

To view the lawsuits, [click here](#).

Companies Have Troubled History

All three companies have paid hundreds of millions of dollars in settlements and fines for failing to monitor suspicious

orders of opioids.

Since 2008, McKesson has paid over \$163 million for its failure to report suspicious orders, including a \$150 million settlement with authorities in 2017, which is a record for a distributor.

Since 2008, Cardinal has paid nearly \$100 million in multiple actions from authorities and state actions relating to its improper management and distribution of opioids to pharmacies across the United States.

At one point, authorities found that Cardinal's own investigator warned the company against selling opioids to four pharmacies in Florida that requested a 241% increase of opioids in only two years. Cardinal did not notify authorities or cut off the supply. Instead, Cardinal's shipment of opioids to the pharmacies increased.

Recently, AmerisourceBergen paid \$16 million as a result of a lawsuit for its role in the opioid epidemic. In 2007, the company actually lost its license to send controlled substances from one of its distribution centers due to a lack of control over shipments of prescription opioids.

State of Crisis

- Between 2006 and 2012, there were over 1.4 billion opioid pills distributed in Oklahoma;

- Drug overdose deaths in Oklahoma increased eightfold from 1999 to 2012, surpassing car crash deaths in 2009;
- In 2012, Oklahoma had the fifth-highest unintentional poisoning death rate and prescription opioids contributed to the majority of those deaths;
- Between 2013 and 2017, an average of 21 Oklahomans died every month from an unintentional prescription opioid overdose;
- In 2014, Oklahoma's unintentional poisoning rate was 107% higher than the national rate;
- Oklahoma leads the nation in non-medical use of painkillers, with nearly 5% of the population ages 12 and older abusing or misusing painkillers.