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Levy County starts action to preempt Attorney General's Office; *Drug addict rehab group may have put cart before horse*



In this photo-array, members of the Levy County Board of County Commissioners are seen at the Tuesday (March 6) meeting. They are (top row, from left) County Commission Chairman John Meeks, County Commissioner Matt Brooks, County Commissioner Lilly Rooks, (bottom row, from left), County Commissioner Rock Meeks and County Commission Vice Chairman Mike Joyner.

Story and Photos

By Jeff M. Hardison © March 9, 2018 at 11:08 a.m.

BRONSON – The Levy County Board of County Commissioners Tuesday gave County Attorney Anne Bast Brown authority to research to make a recommendation on a potential law firm so that the county can sue pharmaceutical companies.

County Commissioners Tuesday heard that Florida Attorney General Pam Bondi is working on a suit on behalf of the state of Florida, where the state will sue pharmaceutical companies for failing to warn patients enough about hazards caused from using certain medicines for pain relief.

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As for Levy County, the County Commission appears to be choosing to go the route of some other counties, because should Bondi's Office win on behalf of the state of Florida, the money netted from the respondents would be divided as the state sees fit among the counties.

By separating itself from that group in the class action suit, Levy County, Pinellas County and some other counties are perceiving a higher return on investment in legal fees, in contrast with simply letting the Attorney General's Office take care of this business.

County Commission Chairman John Meeks said people are suffering from liver failure and kidney failure for extended use of pain-relieving medicine.

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Meeks went on to say people become addicted to painkillers. Then insurance cuts off the prescriptions and they turn to heroin and other opioids. That leads to public funds being needed to arrest them after they become thieves, as well as violating drug laws.

This now-popular cry about the opioid crisis is a carryover from veterans, even farther back than the Vietnam war, coming home with injuries that required pain management. Over time, labs created the medicines of today.

Given the alleged failure by some drug manufacturers to warn users enough, the state government sees a reason to file civil suit. Meanwhile, some counties' elected officials are jumping first to court to avoid having to wait on and depend on the state providing a fair share from what is seen as a potential win in court.

Attorney Brown said she has conducted some preliminary research to find a law firm that will cost nothing for Levy County, prior to the conclusion of the suit. That is when the county would pay the firm. If the county was to lose its suit against the pharmaceutical company (or companies), then the law firm would accept the cost from bringing the suit (such as record review, forensic research and depositions).

On a motion by County Commission Lilly Rooks, seconded by County Commissioner Rock Meeks, the commission voted 5-0 for Attorney Brown to return with a recommendation of a law firm to choose on this matter.

In a separate action, the County Commission chose against granting a rehabilitation group's request for services.

Mending Fences and Ocala Consulting and Prevention currently serve as the rehab service provider for the Marion County Drug Court.

Marion County is in the Fifth Judicial Circuit -- Citrus, Hernando, Lake, Marion and Sumter counties. Levy County Sheriff Bobby McCallum suggested to the rehab service providers that they approach the chief circuit court judge for the Eighth Judicial Circuit -- Alachua, Baker, Bradford, Gilchrist, Levy, and Union counties -- to establish a drug court in Levy County before asking the County Commission to give that provider the contract for service.

There is some activity in the Third Judicial Circuit - Columbia, Dixie, Hamilton, Lafayette, Madison, Suwannee and Taylor counties -- to potentially start a drug court in Dixie County.

Levy County Commission Vice Chairman Mike Joyner, a retired law enforcement officer -- said he endorses methods to help people quit using illegal drugs.

From what he has seen, though, there is only a 3 percent success rate for drug addicts to show continued freedom from being driven by urges to the point that they cannot stay within the bounds of the law.

Click [HERE](#) to see a May 2017 story that *HardisonInk.com* ran on Mending Fences.