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Opioid Lawsuits Filed by 9 N.Y. Counties Transferred, Assigned to Single Judge in Suffolk County

RIVERHEAD, N.Y. — Lawsuits filed by nine New York Counties alleging that drug makers have, for years, misrepresented the dangers of prescription opioids will be transferred to a single state court justice in Suffolk County, according to an order issued July 18.

Justice C. Randall Hinrichs, the Administrative Judge in Suffolk County, said in the one-page order that cases pending in Broome, Dutchess, Erie, Nassau, Orange, Seneca, Schenectady and Sullivan counties will join an identical case already pending in Suffolk County. The resulting coordinated docket will be presided over by Justice Jerry Garguilo, the order says.

Justice Hinrichs said in the order that the assignment of Judge Garguilo as coordinating justice follows an order of the Litigation Coordinating Panel that was issued July 17 by Presiding Justice Joseph J. Maltese. Sources told HarrisMartin Publishing that Maltese's order has not yet been publicly released.

In addition to the nine cases that are subject to the July 17 order, any additional similar cases filed in Suffolk or any other county in the state shall be transferred to Suffolk County Supreme Court for coordination, according to the order.

In recent months, numerous lawsuits have been filed against manufacturers and suppliers of prescription opioid drugs such as Percocet and Oxycontin. The complaints, most of them brought by public entities that employ thousands and fund their own health care plans, accuse the defendants of aggressively marketing the powerful painkillers for long-term and widespread use, despite knowledge that opioids are "too addictive and too debilitating for long-term use."

"Defendants, individually and collectively, knowing that long-term opioid use causes addiction, misrepresented the dangers of long-term opioid use to physicians, pharmacists, and patients by engaging in a campaign to minimize the risks of, and to encourage, long-term opioid use," one complaint filed in Suffolk County says.

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