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MILWAUKEE COUNTY POISED TO RECEIVE MILLIONS TO ASSIST IN OPIOID ABATEMENT AND PREVENTION EFFORT

County Integral Part of Leadership Team

MILWAUKEE, Wis. - Attorneys General and Local Government Leaders from across the country unveiled the terms of a \$26 billion nationwide tentative settlement agreement with drug maker Johnson & Johnson and wholesale distributors, McKesson Corp., Cardinal Health and AmerisourceBergen relative to the litigation in which Milwaukee County has been involved surrounding the opioid epidemic. While the tentative settlement would not end the litigation for all defendants, it represents a significant step forward in bringing needed funds to the County to battle the epidemic.

The tentative settlement arrives after over four years of a nationwide litigation effort. The Office of Corporation Counsel took on a leadership role in that effort ensuring the court and opioid defendants knew how opioids had ravaged the Milwaukee community.

Corporation Counsel Margaret Daun remarked, “This is only the first step, but it is a huge step. Millions of dollars will potentially be made available to battle the opioid problem right here in the County. While money will never replace the lives lost and families broken, I have discussed our plans for abatement at length with local and national leaders and can say with confidence that we are poised to make a meaningful difference in people’s lives.”

The announced settlement comes on the heels of Wisconsin adopting 2021 Wisconsin Act 57, which allocates settlement proceeds from the opioid litigation between the state and local governments. According to Act 57, 70% of the proceeds, including proceeds from the tentative settlement announced today, will go directly to counties and municipalities that sued the opioid defendants. Thanks to the efforts of the Office of Corporation Counsel, Milwaukee County is poised to directly receive a significant share of the proceeds.

While the legislative effort involved all counties from across the state, there is no debate surrounding the value of the Office of Corporation Counsel’s efforts in educating state leaders and advocating for Milwaukee County and all county interests in the context of the legislation. Daun

praised legislative leaders and the Administration for their desire to create a solution. According to Daun, “The Legislature’s ability to recognize the problems confronting Milwaukee County in battling the epidemic and the Administration’s desire to assist are very much appreciated. While I spent countless hours speaking with anybody and everybody willing to listen about the impact opioids have had on our medical examiner, court system, human services and law enforcement programs and services, not to mention our citizens themselves, it is gratifying to see those efforts result in understanding and agreement about how these settlement proceeds can best be put to use in abating the epidemic.”

Milwaukee County Executive David Crowley noted the importance of Corporation Counsel Daun’s involvement and the tenacity with which her office pursued legal and legislative help. “I remain hopeful that we can stem the tide of opioid abuse issues in Milwaukee County and the tentative settlement is one of the things that gives me hope. None of this would have been possible without the tireless work from Corporation Counsel Daun and her staff.”

Before becoming final, the nationwide tentative settlement agreement must meet the approval of two groups. First, states have 30 days to decide whether to participate in the settlement. If enough states agree, then counties and cities have the opportunity to accept the terms. A critical mass of state and local governments must agree to the terms before funds are released to the communities that have been impacted by the epidemic.

Corporation Counsel Daun is confident states and local governments from around the country will see the wisdom in approving the settlement terms. “I’ve spoken with my colleagues from around the country and interfaced with the top lawyers leading the litigation effort. The tentative settlement, while long overdue, is the right result. We need to get this approved and get the money in the hands of the people who can make a difference.”

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