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# Mayor Bell and the City of Birmingham Joining the Fight to Stop the Flood of Opioids

### Contact:

**April Odom**

**Mayor's Office of Public Information**

BIRMINGHAM, Ala., Aug. 14, 2017 – Mayor William Bell announced today that the City of Birmingham is joining other cities across the country in fighting the prescription opioid epidemic by filing suit against the companies responsible for dumping millions of dollars' worth of prescription opioids into our community.

The opioid crisis is a national emergency. Today, the city of Birmingham has filed suit against the country's three largest wholesale drug distributors — Cardinal Health, AmerisourceBergen, and McKesson – which are responsible for dumping pills into our neighborhoods and refusing to fulfill their obligations to monitor, identify, report and halt suspicious shipments of opioids.

Congress, knowing there was a significant likelihood for abuse of highly addictive prescription opioids, put Wholesale Distributors in a position of trust as gatekeepers responsible for halting suspicious orders and controlling against the diversion of the drugs to illegitimate uses.

But the Wholesale Distributors, with combined annual revenues of \$400 billion and profits in the billions of dollars, failed in their duties and instead profited from the flood of pills into our community. The companies control 85% of the market for prescription opioids and profited from the opioid epidemic. And in the last few years, the big three wholesale distributors have paid over \$200 million in fines for the same conduct covered in the complaint. In the meantime, the state of Alabama is struggling with the toll opioid abuse is taking on our communities and public resources.

"As in other cities across the state, the opioid epidemic has been taking the lives of our young people and destroying families throughout our communities," Mayor Bell said. "When it comes to helping all that are affected by this devastating problem, providing solutions must be our top priority."

Mayor Bell is determined to lead the charge to end the crisis of opioid addiction. In 2012, Alabama had the highest level of prescription opioid use in the nation. (source: AL.com) Doctors in the state wrote 5.8 million prescriptions for pain pills in 2015, according to the Centers for Disease Control. That amounts to about 1.2 prescriptions per person (compared to the national average of 0.71).

The opioid epidemic is creating pressure on health care facilities, municipal courts, fire departments and law enforcement agencies, resulting in rising costs, a strain on resources, and concerns about public safety.

"It has only grown worse as people who were addicted to prescription pills have, thanks to heightened enforcement efforts, found them harder to come by," said Birmingham Police Chief A.C. Roper. The residents of Birmingham and the City's infrastructure bear the burden of the cost of the epidemic, as the costs of treatment for addiction, education and law enforcement have continued to rise and opioid addicts have turned to street drugs like heroin and fentanyl.

Opioid abuse is now the leading cause of death for those under 50. In Jefferson County alone, more than 200 people died from overdoses of heroin or fentanyl in 2016, according to the coroner's office, more than double the previous year. In addition to the cost in human life, researchers estimate the total economic burden of the prescription opioid epidemic at \$78.5 billion.

Copies of the City's lawsuit will be available later today.

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