Unlimited Digital Access - $1 for the first 3 months

Advertisement



WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS

Western Mass. talks about spending opioid settlement funds

Updated: May. 13, 2026, 8:27 p.m. | Published: May. 13, 2026, 8:18 p.m.

Listen:
Western Mass. talks about spending opioid settlement funds
About 4 Minutes
1x
Everlit

By Jeanette DeForge | jdeforge@repub.com

SPRINGFIELD — Social workers and counselors said Western Massachusetts desperately needs more sober housing, additional preventative education programs and extra supports for families victimized by the opioid epidemic crisis. They should be funded with more than $1 billion the state will receive from pharmaceutical companies.

Multiple companies, accused of misleading the public on the additive effects of opioids and causing an epidemic of substance abuse, will pay the state settlement money over the next 18 years.

Officials for the Massachusetts Executive Office of Health and Human Services Wednesday visited Springfield as a part of a statewide tour to reach out to providers, victims and families to start planning the best ways to spend the money, said Julia Newhall, director of opioid abatement, strategy and implementation for the state's bureau of substance addiction.

"Black people need not to be swept under the rug. When it comes to loss of life, they are disproportionately impacted and we sincerely need a yeoman's effort to be very specific on how it is we address this crisis," said Richard Johnson, program director for New North Citizens Council in Springfield.

Looking at the way the money is currently divvied out, Johnson called 4% of all the funding set aside for family supports is "totally inadequate" compared to 42% going to service expansion and enhancement and 14% going to workforce development.

He argued the settlements were made due to the thousands of people who have died by opioid overdoses and those families need funds and not just for funeral costs. The caretakers of children left behind, often grandparents, need help to pay for counseling, summer camps and just basic necessities they weren't expecting to fund from retirement income.

The settlement agreements call for 60% of the money to go the state and the remaining 40% to be parsed out to all cities and towns, according to a formula based on a variety of variables including how badly each community has been impacted by the opioid epidemic, Newhall said.

"These funds are to be used solely to supplement and strengthen (programs) rather than supplant," she said. They can be used for prevention, harm reduction, treatment and encourage trying innovative uses to find new ways to battle the crisis.

The state is trying to find the gaps in needs, she said. Those who attended spent more than an hour talking about how many ways the system was lacking in helping people fighting addiction.

Several people said there needs to be better coordination. Addiction programs are constantly changing as grant funding comes and goes so it can take multiple calls and outreach work even for the most experienced to find services for people. It is even more complex if the client doesn't have insurance or a picture identification.

Many said a lack of housing of all type[illegible]roblem. People may do well in rehabilitation centers but providers have difficulty fi[illegible]tional or sober housing so they can continue their recovery.

One provider said she needs temporary places to house people who say they are ready for treatment but may not be able to be placed in a program for a day or two. Once those people return to wherever they are staying, they are likely not to return.

“The ones struggling with substance abuse are living in very unsafe housing,” said Michelle Jones, executive director of the First Pioneer Valley Dream Center in Springfield. “They are trying to get clean and living in slumlord situations and surrounded by roommates who they are (administering Narcan to) every day.”

Others said prevention is as important as treatment and would like to see more opioid education programs taught with an evidence-based curriculum in health classes.

Some said they run into high school students who know little about fentanyl, which causes a lot of overdoses. Others said a large number of people in substance abuse recovery programs said they started using hard drugs before they hit their teen years.

MORE WESTERN MASS. CONTENT

Hampshire College rural land may be protected under new proposal by local land trusts

Summer Guide 2026: MGM Springfield makes use of outdoor spaces this summer

Holyoke suspects charged in fatal shooting of Uber driver Caleb Rodriguez

Pan’e Dolcetti moving, expanding in Wilbraham

Springfield fire at Vibra Hospital brings renewed attention to vacant building

Sponsor Content

The State Is Holding Over $3 Billion — Some of It Could Be Yours

Massachusetts makes it easy to search and claim what you're owed — for free.

FindMassMoney.gov



▼ MassLive Media



About MassLive Media

Advertise with us

Sponsor Content

Accessibility Statement

▼ Follow Us

Facebook

Worcester Facebook

Red Sox Facebook

Patriots Facebook

Bruins Facebook

Twitter

YouTube

HS Sports Twitter

Sports Twitter

Instagram

HS Sports Instagram

RSS

▼ MassLive.com Sections

All News

All Sports

Entertainment

Politics

Opinion

High School Sports

Betting

Living

Real Estate

Obituaries

Classifieds

Autos

Jobs

▼ **More on MassLive.com**

Careers at MassLive

Community rules

The Republican Special Sections

Place an ad

Newspapers.com Archive

Privacy Policy | User Agreement | Ad Choices

ADVANCE LOCAL

Use of and/or registration on any portion of this site constitutes acceptance of our User Agreement, (updated 8/1/2024) and acknowledgement of our Privacy Policy, and Your Privacy Choices and Rights (updated 1/1/2026).

© 2026 Advance Local Media LLC. All rights reserved (About Us).
The material on this site may not be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, cached or otherwise used, except with the prior written permission of Advance Local.

Community Rules apply to all content you upload or otherwise submit to this site.

YouTube's privacy policy is available here and **YouTube's terms of service** is available here.

Ad Choices