

Attorney General Jeff Sessions creates new DEA office to 'turn tide' in opioid crisis

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(Photo: Patrick Sison, AP)

WASHINGTON – For the first time in 20 years, the Drug Enforcement Administration is opening a new field office, in an attempt to turn the tide in the worsening opioid crisis that has fueled record-setting overdose fatalities across the country.

Attorney General Jeff Sessions said Wednesday that the DEA's 22nd field office would be located in Louisville, Ky., part of a region plagued by the abuse of the prescription painkiller, heroin and the deadly synthetic drug fentanyl.

At least 90 federal drug agents will be redeployed to the Louisville office to conduct enforcement operations throughout Kentucky, West Virginia and Tennessee.

"I know that this crisis is daunting," Sessions said, referring to government estimates that 64,000 Americans died from drug overdoses last year. "But we can, and we will turn the tide."

More: [Trump orders public health emergency for opioids, a partial measure to fight drug epidemic \(/story/news/politics/2017/10/26/exclusive-trump-declare-public-health-emergency-opioid-crisis-partial-measure-figh/796797001/\)](#)

More: [The NIH is seeking a way to objectively measure pain. Could it help solve the opioid crisis? \(/story/news/politics/2017/11/21/pain-o-meter-solution-opioid-crisis/840027001/\)](#)

As part of the Trump campaign's against opioid abuse, Sessions also announced that federal grants totaling \$12 million will be directed to hard-hit areas –from New England to Appalachia – to fund anti-heroin task forces and to aid in the break-up of methamphetamine operations.

Sessions also said that all 94 U.S. attorney offices across the country would designate officials to coordinate opioid enforcement operations in their regions.

"We will not cede one city, one neighborhood or one street corner to gangs, violence or drugs," the attorney general said.

Last month, Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein said Justice officials were reviewing whether to seek a repeal of 2016 legislation supported by the drug industry that ultimately hampered law enforcement's ability to stop suspicious shipments of opioids that have been driving surges in overdose deaths.

On Wednesday, Sessions said he was "dubious" about the law when it was considered while he was an Alabama senator. While the attorney general declined to say whether he would lobby to repeal the law, he said he would support "new legislation" to counter suspicious sales of opioids.

Earlier this year, *The Washington Post* and 60 Minutes reported that the DEA was essentially handcuffed by the law pushed by Rep. Tom Marino, R-Pa., who later became President Trump's nominee to oversee national drug policy.

Marino ultimately withdrew his name from consideration in wake of the public disclosures about his advocacy for the law.

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