

Ensure Your Wishes Are Honored

» BY JULIE ROSE

Having important legal documents in place is critical to ensure that your wishes are honored while you are alive and after your death.

This is especially important for seniors. If you don't have the following documents in place or they need to be updated, it's advisable to meet with an elder law attorney and address this. It will provide you with peace of mind.

Will: This legal document lets you

determine who will receive your specific assets after your death. It's important for everyone to have a will but is critical for seniors. If you don't have a will, the courts will decide what happens to your assets.



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Medical directive: This is also known as an advanced directive. This legal document clearly establishes the level and extent of care you want to receive

if you become ill or incapacitated. Your medical directive will state if you want artificial support for breathing and eating, such as a ventilator and feeding tube, or you don't want heroic measures. Your wishes are respected, and your family has clarity and guidance with this document.

Power of attorney for healthcare: This legal document enables you to designate someone to make healthcare decisions for you if you are unable to do so. By appointing someone in advance, timely and effective decisions can be made in the

event of your illness or incapacity. Without this document, medical professionals will look to your family and in some circumstances to your friends, or medical treatments may be determined by the medical team. If the situation becomes complicated, a formal process must take place in probate court to have a guardian and/or a conservator appointed. This is a slow and expensive process that requires medical testimony.

Power of attorney for finances: This empowers the person you choose to manage your financial affairs, pay your bills, sell property, contract for services, determine living arrangements and make similar decisions. As mentioned above, if no one has been designated to serve, the courts may need to appoint a guardian/conservator, leaving you with no say in who will make these decisions on your behalf.

There are limited, durable, general and springing powers of attorney, so it's important to discuss your specific wishes and preferences clearly with your elder law attorney.

If you don't have a family member you can designate for these important roles, you can retain an experienced, trusted professional to provide essential advocacy services for you. They can serve as your conservator, trustee, financial and medical power of attorney and representative payee. Their services can be provided to meet your specific wishes and needs. It's essential to choose a well-qualified person to assume these roles for you. Be sure you choose wisely.

Julie Rose, M.Ed., CDP, CHC, is CEO of Paladin Life Care providing care and advocacy for senior clients and those with disabilities in Virginia, Maryland and the District of Columbia. If you have questions about ensuring that your wishes are honored, you can reach her at info@paladinlifecare.com or call (703) 879-6992.

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