

Helping families survive after a death or disability

By Linda T. Cammuso

Death and taxes are certainties in life, we've all heard that. What you may not know is that the likelihood of becoming disabled is much greater than the likelihood of dying. Proper planning for either disability or death is one of the most thoughtful things you can do for your family. The documents that you need to pull together to make things easier for your family in the event of your disability or death are listed below.



Legal Briefs

Essential documents

Speak to an estate-planning attorney if you don't have the first five vital documents in place. They will ensure that your spouse, children or other family member can easily take charge and make decisions on your

behalf, and that your wishes are honored and end-of-life matters are carried out with dignity. Have on hand the following:

- Will;
- Trust(s);
- Durable power of attorney;
- Health care proxy/HIPPA release;
- Living will;
- Funeral insurance policies or pre-paid funeral arrangements; and
- Letter describing your last wishes.

Additional important documents

Make a list of the following documents and their locations to include with your end-of-life documents:

- Deeds;
- In-force life insurance policies and annuity contracts;
- Bank statements showing account numbers and contact information;
- Brokerage statements with account numbers, broker's name and contact information;
- IRA, pension and all retirement fund information;

- Income tax returns;
- Homeowners insurance policies;
- Auto and vehicle insurance policies;
- Long-term care insurance policies;
- Disability policies;
- Business owners — corporate/company records including share certificates and shareholder agreements; and
- Titles to vehicles.

For consideration

There's even more that you can do to make it easier to handle your affairs. Consider including the following information as well:

- Contact information for your executor, successor trustee, financial advisor, accountant and insurance agent;
- The names and numbers of your primary care physician or specialists;
- A list of prescription medications;
- Copies of your Medicare, Medicaid or other health insurance cards;
- Birth certificate;
- Marriage license;
- Divorce decree;

- Employer information;
- Military discharge papers;
- Citizenship documents; and
- List of credit cards and list of debts.

Finally, be sure to secure your documents in a safe place and inform key family members, friends and/or advisors where the information is kept.

Undoubtedly it might seem daunting to gather all of this information. With the holiday season upon us, what better time to think of giving family members the gift of disability and end-of-life planning information to help guide them through what can be a grievous and trying time.

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