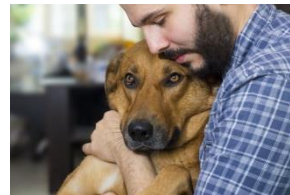


PROTECTING YOUR PET IN CASE OF YOUR DEATH OR INCAPACITY

While we have many people in our busy lives, our pets have only us. Everyone needs an estate plan, and no pet owner's plan is complete without ensuring that his or her beloved pet is provided for. Have you thought about what would happen to your pet if you are deceased or incapacitated? With approximately two-thirds of American households owning a pet, chances are that your family or someone you know shares a home with a pet. While the lifespans of pets are generally not as long as we would like them to be, they are long enough to warrant consideration in our estate plans, especially for animals such as dogs, cats, horses, parrots, and turtles. Without provisions for your pet in your overall estate plan, in the short term, your pet could go days at home without food and water, and could feel panicked, distressed, or abandoned. In the long term, your pet could end up with someone you don't want them to end up with, or at a shelter where he or she might be euthanized. Including the following documents in your estate plan can help to ensure that someone has access to your home and authorization to care for your pets in the short term, and can ensure that you decide who will ultimately care for your pets, and how they will be cared for, if you are deceased or incapacitated.



DURABLE POWER OF ATTORNEY FOR PET CARE

The Durable Power of Attorney for Pet Care allows you to authorize someone else to seek medical care for your pet. This document is important in the case of your incapacity. It can also be used by a pet caretaker while you are away on business or vacation. As in a Healthcare Power of Attorney for yourself, you can specify to what extent the Pet Care Power of Attorney is authorized to act on your behalf.

PET TRUST

A pet trust is a great way to ensure that your pet is cared and provided for after your death. It allows you to name the caretaker of your pets and creates a legal obligation on the named caretaker to care for your pet in the manner described in your trust. In a pet trust, which may be a part of your existing trust or may be a completely separate trust, you will provide money for your pet to be cared for, and the caretaker that you name for your pet must use the funds to care for your pet, or he or she can be sued. A pet trust also allows you to name successive caretakers in case your preferred caretaker becomes unable to take care of your pet. This type of planning affords the best protection for your pet and should be drafted by an experienced estate planning attorney.



PET CARE INSTRUCTIONS

Pet care instructions will accompany the instructions in your pet trust, but are important to have as a separate provision so that you can change your pet care instructions as your pet's needs and tastes change without having to update your trust. The pet care instructions should be reviewed and updated frequently to ensure that food requirements, medical information, and emergency contacts are up to date. It's also a good idea to include information about what your pet likes and doesn't like, any quirks your pet may have, and generally anything else you would want someone caring for your pet to know. This versatile document, like the Durable Power of Attorney for Pet Care, can also be left with someone caring for your pet while you are away on business or vacation.



PET OWNER'S WALLET CARD

This extra protection will immediately notify someone that you have pets at home if you are found to be deceased or incapacitated somewhere other than your home. Similar to adding "in case of emergency" contacts to your phone, having information in your wallet about who should be contacted to quickly provide care to your pets in such a situation can be the difference between your pets being cared for quickly or being home alone for days without food or water.

Whether updating your existing plan to include your pets, or creating a brand new estate plan, contact Rebecca Wrock at 248-489-8600 or rebecca.wrock@couzens.com to find out how you can ensure that your pet will be properly cared for in the event of your death or incapacity.