

MASON COUNTY SENIORS NEED ASSISTANCE WITH LEGAL DOCUMENTS

By Susan Evans, Mason County Senior Services

The Mason County Senior Needs Survey completed earlier in 2025 indicates nearly 20% of our seniors need help with legal documents such as wills, powers of attorney, or advance directives. Of those who need this help, 10% said they can't afford it while 9% said they could. Let's explore the legal resources available to seniors here in Mason County.

Advance directives include a living will (your choices about life-sustaining treatments) and durable healthcare power of attorney, also known as a medical power of attorney which allows you to designate someone to make healthcare decisions for you if you're not able to. Most hospitals have these forms available for free so you can complete them if you don't already have them.

Anyone can use the www.michiganlegalhelp.org website for free do-it-yourself legal forms including medical power of attorney and financial power of attorney. **Michigan Legal Help (MLH)** is an excellent resource. It is part of Michigan Statewide Advocacy Services which is a nonprofit organization that serves individuals in Michigan. As is the case with most legal forms you can find on the internet, proceed with caution. Generic forms are not always perfect for every situation. They may leave significant gaps in your estate plan. Many adults turn to a reputable elder law attorney to ensure legal forms are properly executed and to ensure estate plans cover all possible scenarios. The fees for document preparation may be less than you expect. Talk to your family and friends about recommendations for an elder law attorney. Also use caution when friends and family offer legal advice

since minor differences may mean their situation and suggestions would not apply to you. Look for an elder law attorney who offers free information sessions or consultations to get started or call law offices and ask about their fees for consultation and fees to prepare documents. Some can handle all of it without going in-person to the office, especially if you are disabled or unable to do so.

One of the benefits of estate planning is avoiding the court-supervised process of transferring assets after death, known as probate. It may take up to two years to complete the probate process with additional time and money needed too if there are disputes to be resolved.

MLH might refer you to the **Counsel & Advocacy Law Line (CALL)** at 888-783-8190. CALL offers free legal advice to seniors and those with low income, as well as brief services (like document review), and referrals via telephone for seniors and others who qualify in areas like housing, public benefits such as Medicare Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security

Disability Insurance (SSDI), family law, and consumer issues.

Legal Aid of Western Michigan may also be a helpful resource but keep in mind they do not specialize in complicated cases. They are a nonprofit law firm providing free legal services to adults aged 60+ and to others based on income. To apply for their services by phone, call 231-726-4887 or 800-968-4887 Monday through Friday 8:30 a.m. to noon and 1:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. To apply for their services online, visit their website at www.lawestmi.org.

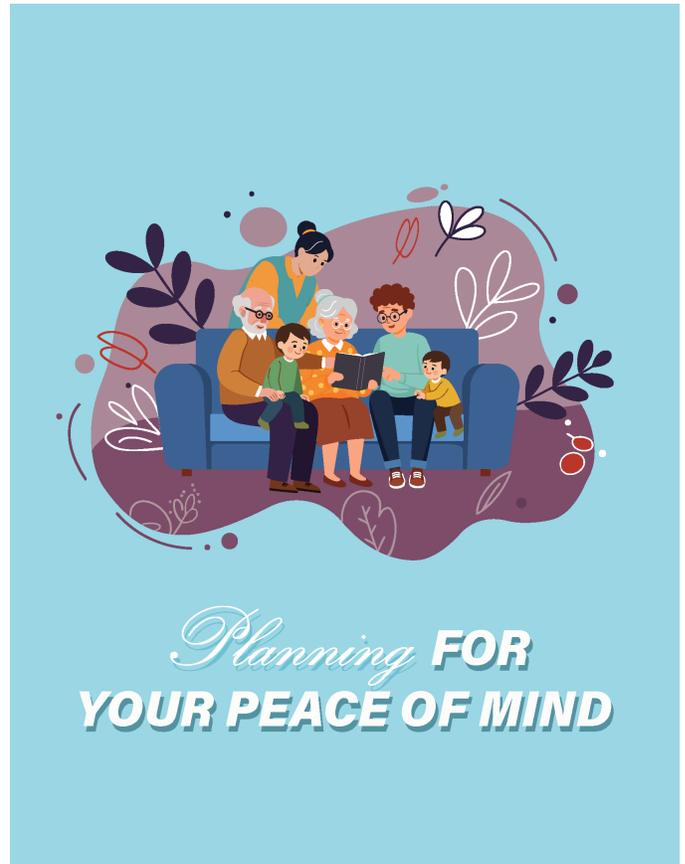
One of the benefits of estate planning is avoiding the court-supervised process of transferring assets after death, known as probate. It may take up to two years to complete the probate process with additional time and money needed too if there are disputes to be resolved. During the probate period, assets owned solely by the



deceased are frozen. This can include homes, automobiles, bank accounts, and personal property. Probate filings are public so there should be no expectation of privacy.

Experts also suggest taking an inventory of your most significant possessions, whether their significance is financial or sentimental. Consider gifting those items to the right person now in order to allow loved ones to focus on healing from their grief rather than feuding over grandma's punchbowl or grandpa's rifle collection. AARP suggests, "Wherever you are in your life span or caregiving experience, it's never too soon to take a good look around and start making decisions about what is no longer serving the household or its occupants and where it should all go in life — and in death."

If you have questions about resources for seniors, email Susan Evans at sevans@masoncountymi.gov. Seniors who need help finding programs and services can also contact the Area on Aging of Western Michigan (AAAWM) at 888-456-5664 Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. or one of the four senior centers in Mason County. Another helpful resource is the **Active for Life** publication for seniors which is available at senior centers, various locations throughout the community, and online at www.scottvilleareaseniorcenter.com.



Planning **FOR** **YOUR PEACE OF MIND**

A State of Michigan Publication

This booklet provides a basic introduction to estate planning as well as general information pertaining to Michigan's Uniform Power of Attorney Act, patient advocate designations, organ donations, and funeral representative designations.

<https://www.legislature.mi.gov/documents/Publications/PeaceofMind.pdf>