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ESTATE PLANNING: THINGS TO CONSIDER IF YOU HAVE PETS

If you own one or more pets, your estate planning documents should contain provisions for them if you become disabled or die. Your pets, although beloved family members to you, are legally considered "personal property" subject to division in family law (ie: divorce) or subject to placement in probate law (ie: after death). If you breed dogs, there can be ownership issues when you die (example: some breeders provide that they jointly own your dog). In all cases, you need a practical plan to provide for your pets if something unanticipated happens to you in your home, or if you become disabled and are no longer able to return home, whether short or long term. The reality is that if you must leave your home, or if you die at home, an Animal Patrol agent will arrive at your home shortly after the EMTs to confiscate your animal. The following are practical considerations and recommendations to be a responsible and prepared pet owner.

- Place an engraved identification tag on your dog with the name of the person who will care for your pet in the event of your disability or death. Include the person's name, address, and telephone number. Likewise, keep a note or magnet on your refrigerator with the same information. It is also recommended to place a sticker by each of the outside doors in your home to indicate you have pets.
- Establish a checking or savings account containing funds necessary to care for your pet in the event of your disability or death, even if a minimal amount, to be used in the event of an emergency. Designate the account "payable on death" (POD) to your contact person and pet caretaker.
- Keep your pet's records digitally, "in the cloud" so that if you lose your paper records, you will still have up to date information for your pets. This information should include AKC registration and records, immunizations, medications, and dog license numbers.
- Keep a kennel for your pet on wheels, close to your exit door, so that if you had to move quickly to escape a fire, you can move your animals quickly to safety. In a Ziploc bag, attached to the kennel, keep the following:
 - (i) Food and water to last at least 3 days
 - (ii) Collar and Leash
 - (iii) Medications
 - (iv) Contact information for Veterinarian
 - (v) Copy of immunization records
- Carefully review sales contracts with breeders. Given the details of some contracts, you cannot rely upon AKC records alone for proof of ownership.
- Microchip your pets.
- Include provisions in your estate planning documents (Will or Trust), and in your Financial Power of Attorney (POA) giving someone authority to care for your pet in the event of disability or death. You may want to consider a Pet Trust in the provisions of your Will or Trust.