

Military Association of Atheists & Freethinkers



1821 Jefferson Pl NW, Washington, DC 20036
(202) 656-6223 | jtorpy@militaryatheists.org
FIGHTING FOR THE FREEDOMS WE DEFEND

Subject: Life and Legacy Giving

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End-of-life Planning sounds like something you do towards the end of your life. But the reality is, no one knows what tomorrow will bring. If you have something to lose, or something to give, then now is the time to plan for your stuff. Whatever your financial assets, it is always the time to express your wishes, in terms of organ donation, memorial services, and how to handle decisions about you if you become incapable of making decisions due to mental or physical disabilities (or death). Don't leave these difficult and important decisions up to your family.

Have a will and update (or reconfirm) it periodically. The contents of the will should include distribution of your financial and physical assets, instructions for your memorial (including your comments if you desire), disposition for your remains, a living will (see below), and all of the many details related to those main portions.

Take a few minutes to update your will to name MAAF or another charity as a beneficiary. **The EIN for MAAF is 45-3987347.** Executor services may be provided by charities named as beneficiaries.

1. Your decisions are a gift: The most important part of this type of planning isn't the distribution of assets, it's the assurance that whatever happens, **you have already made the hard decisions** for your family. They know your wishes and can honor you. They will also know that you took the time to provide for them as best you could. So do take the time.
2. Dependent Care: Where would you like to live out your days? While you may prefer to stay with your children, friends, or at the Ritz-Carlton, your resources may be limited. Considering your living arrangements when you are unable to drive, do all your chores, or even care for yourself can be sobering but necessary. **Don't take your family for granted as late-life caregivers.** You may even find a certain retirement facility you prefer to family.
3. Advance Directive: An advance directive is your decision about how your care should be handled should you be unable to make the decision. This includes a "**Living Will**" to determine such treatments like resuscitation, mechanical ventilation, feeding or hydration assistance, or dialysis. An advance directive should also identify **medical Power of Attorney (POA)** in case you are no longer competent due to traumatic brain injury, Alzheimer's symptoms, or an infection. While someone with POA will make decisions, you can make as many of these decisions as possible with proper foresight. Be certain to include a requirement to check for Locked-In Syndrome.
4. Death with Dignity: In the United States, suicide, assisted suicide, and euthanasia are generally illegal. That does not, however, mean you cannot make your wishes known. Consider chronic pain, painful treatments leading to certain, near-certain, or even possible death, locked-in and other debilitating conditions. Society has thus far chosen a dogmatic, one-size-fits-all approach to these situations, but **you can still make your choice known.**
5. Disposition of Remains: Your body is a valuable asset in itself. Consider becoming an organ donor. Ensure your information is on file and your signed approval is on your person. Your organs can save many lives if made available. For remaining portions, or if you are not a suitable

donor, you may choose cremation or whole-body retention, and you may choose to be buried at sea rather than on land. Consider the environmental and financial cost of a burial plot.

6. Memorial services. Services come in all shapes and sizes, but it is best if you have already made plans so grieving loved ones need not make the decision. Your decisions about church involvement and religious ceremonies may also be different than your family. **Planning ahead allows you to have a part as well**, for example with a written or video message. While a memorial service is part of the grieving process, you may also encourage a festive atmosphere to celebrate your life rather than family defaulting to a somber affair.
7. Financial Considerations: The most obvious part of the will is setting up a distribution for your financial assets. You may distribute to spouse, children, or charities. You may want to reserve funds for a memorial service. You may want this to be distributed in the execution of the will or over time through a trust. **Failing to make your wishes clear is the best way to sew discontent in the family after your death.**
8. Physical Assets: You may have a house and a car, books and CDs, or sentimental items. You may bequeath valuable items as a whole, designate them to be sold at auction, or simply ask the executors to make a determination. It is good to **ask family and friends if there are any sentimental items they would like** to have. If still available, those items can be given over to those that value them.
9. Resolving Debts: Individual debts must be resolved by the state and those should be handled by the executor. This can be complicated when one has **joint account holders, guarantors, or beneficiaries who may be held liable to resolve outstanding debts**. If the estate is insolvent (more debts than assets), then creditors should be notified. This will also render moot any discussion of distribution of your assets.
10. Special Financial Vehicles: **Remember that Estate Taxes are significant and there are many ways to distribute your Estate before or after death with minimal tax impact, but only if you plan ahead.** Creating trusts, transferring funds to others, special types of investments, offshoring, purchasing life insurance, and other sorts of financial magic are all available to shelter assets, limit tax liability, and otherwise maximize the amount of your estate that passes on. These are all too complicated for this short article, but that information is available through a talented Estate Planner and Attorney team.
11. Other details: Ensure executors, guardians, or trustees are designated. Also discuss the location/account/passwords of important information. Make sure your will is kept in an obvious, secure, and fireproof place. Make sure to discuss all these details or at least the location with your executor(s) and family to avoid any problems in the execution of the will.