



Planning for Your Pet's Care After Your Death

According to 2024 statistics from the World Population Review, 59% of Wisconsin households have a pet. No matter if the animal/s is a household pet or livestock, such as horses, cows, etc., it is important to think about how your animals will be cared for after your death.



While many people think of pets as family members, in Wisconsin, pets are legally considered to be property (wisbar.org). As with other property like vehicles & homes, what happens to your pets after your death is determined by your "will." A will is a document with directions on how to handle your property after death.

Your wishes for your pet may not be honored if you die without a will. If this happens, the WI state court will decide what happens to your pet. You can learn more about the importance of having a will at this webpage: <https://finances.extension.wisc.edu/articles/what-is-a-will-why-is-it-important-to-have-one/>

As you make your will, you can also think about your pet's care. Here are important steps to take when planning for your pet's care after your death.

Pick a Caretaker for Your Pet

Make a list of trusted people, including family members and friends, who can care for your pet if you can't. If you have more than one pet, you may want to consider having more than one caretaker. Once you have chosen your pet's caretaker/s, it can help to talk with the

selected caretakers about the responsibility. They may gladly accept the opportunity to care for your pet/s. However, they may choose to not accept the responsibility. In that case, you'll know to ask other people on your list of possible caretakers for your pet/s.

After you confirm your caretaker/s, it can be helpful to also have an alternate caretaker if the chosen caretaker's situation changes and they later choose to not care for the pet/s. Also, it helps to tell your caretaker the name & location of your pet's veterinarian and to give your veterinarian the caretaker's name & contact information.

If no family members or friends would be a good fit to care for your pet/s then you can also explore animal charities, veterinary schools, or humane organizations that can care for your pet/s or find them a new home.

Decide If You Will Leave Money to Care for Your Pet

After you have picked a caretaker/s, you can think about how your caretaker will financially support your pet/s. The average amount for pet care costs each year can range from a few hundred dollars for fish and small birds to more than \$2000 for dogs and cats (anticruelty.org). Because of these costs, it is important to think about if you can leave money for your pet's care.

One option is to state in your will the amount of money from your savings, or the sale of items you own, that should be used for your pet's care. Another option is to create a "pet trust." A trust is a written agreement that establishes a separate entity to manage property (State Bar of WI). With a pet trust, you can leave specific directions for how and when to use money for your pet's care. If interested, you should talk to a lawyer about this option.

If you'd like to explore this topic more, you should consider participating in UW-Extension's Planning AHEAD program. Planning AHEAD is an end-of-life planning program that is offered in-person and online.

To talk about other important family and financial topics, contact a UW-Extension educator in your county. Visit <https://counties.extension.wisc.edu/> for more information.