

Options You Should Know Before Filing a Petition for a Full Adult Guardianship

Sometimes adults need help taking care of themselves and making decisions. Michigan law allows a judge to appoint a “guardian” of an adult in certain situations where help is needed.

A court-appointed guardian can make decisions for the person who needs help. The judge will determine what decisions the guardian can make.

A guardian might be able to decide:

- where the person lives
- what medical care the person should receive
- who will care for the person every day

There are many things you should think about before you file a petition. If at all possible, the adult who needs help should talk to a lawyer to help figure out what is best for him or her.

There are options other than a full guardianship. Not all the options will work for everyone. Some of them will only work if the person is still able to make decisions. Some depend on what help the person may need. A few of these options other than a full guardianship are briefly described here.

Conservator

A conservator is appointed by a judge to take care of another adult’s finances and assets. A conservator is not expected to use his or her own money to support the adult needing assistance. The court can also limit a conservator’s authority to certain kinds of decisions for the adult. The conservator:

- manages assets
- pays the bills
- makes general financial decisions for the person

Durable Power of Attorney

An adult can choose to appoint someone to take care of his or her finances through a financial “durable power of attorney.” **The adult** must be of sound mind to sign this document. He or she can:

- limit when this document is effective
- limit what the appointed person can do

Because a durable power of attorney can be complicated and can give away a great deal of power, it is best that the adult seek the help of a lawyer to prepare it.

Health Care Power of Attorney

You will sometimes hear this called a “patient advocate designation” or a “durable power of attorney for health care.” It is a document an adult can sign that gives someone else the authority to make care decisions when he or she is not capable. Those decisions could be about:

- health care
- mental health treatment
- living arrangements

The adult can give the “agent” or “patient advocate” as much or as little authority as the person wants. This can include authority to withhold or withdraw life support services. **The adult** must be of sound mind to sign this document and must decide he or she wants it.

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Do Not Resuscitate Order

If the adult is an inpatient at a hospital, his or her wishes regarding resuscitation should be discussed with his or her physician as soon as possible.

If the adult is not in a hospital, he or she can sign a document that will refuse CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation). This document is known as a “Do Not Resuscitate Order” or “DNR.” The adult must be of sound mind to sign this document.

Physician Orders for Scope of Treatment (POST) Form

An adult can work with his or her attending health professional to complete a document that will specify types of medical treatment that are permissible. This document is called a physician orders for scope of treatment (POST) form.

A POST form contains medical orders that are jointly agreed to by the adult and the attending health professional or a patient representative and the attending health professional. A POST form is not intended to be used as a stand-alone advance health care directive. The adult must be of sound mind to sign the form. A POST form may be obtained through the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services.

Limited Guardian

A limited guardian is appointed by a judge to make limited decisions in certain instances. For example, the judge may say that the guardian can only make decisions about living arrangements. A limited guardianship can give a person some independence while providing the specific help needed.

Filing a Petition for Full Adult Guardianship

To ask that a guardian be appointed for an adult, a *Petition for Appointment of Guardian of Incapacitated Individual* (PC 625) must be filed with the court. A judge will appoint a guardian only if the condition of the adult fits specific requirements. The specific conditions that must be met are found in form PC 625, which is available at your local probate court or at www.courts.mi.gov/formssearch.