



VIRGINIA  
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SOCIETY

## Letter of Last Instruction

A letter of last instruction is not a will. It is not legally binding on anyone. It is a description of your wishes concerning your funeral and instructions concerning the location of documents and information necessary to handle your affairs after your death.

Writing a letter of last instruction helps your family and friends to make decisions in an informed manner in the middle of their grief.

Either give your letter of last instruction to the person who you think will be in charge of your funeral or let that person know that the letter exists and where to find it at your residence.

Following is a suggested outline of information you should include in your letter of last instruction. Feel free to include any additional information you desire.

### Funeral Arrangements

- Disposition of body
  - Any religious requirements concerning disposition of the body
  - Embalming (funeral home will require family to sign a form to permit embalming)
  - Cremation - disposition of ashes
  - Donation of body to medical science
    - Generally, arrangements must be made with institution before death
    - Name of institution
  - Donation of organs
  
- Cost
  - How much do you want family to spend?

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- Funeral home must show purchaser a list of charges, including good-faith estimates on cash advance items (e.g., grave opening) and quote prices to purchasers over the telephone
- Prepaid burial plan
  - Plan document location
  - Funeral home
    - Location
    - Person to contact at funeral home
- Type of casket
- Type of vault (Funeral home must show purchaser a price list before selection of casket and vault)
- Viewing
  - Open or closed casket
  - May public visit at the funeral home/church, family home
  - Special clothing in which you wish to be dressed
  - Special items to be interred with you
- Flowers or donations to charity (any specific charity or charitable organization?)
- Funeral/Memorial Service
  - Time
    - Any religious requirements concerning timing of the funeral or interment
    - When should it be held (special time of day, # days after death, etc.)
    - Anyone special who should be invited
  - Location
    - Funeral home
    - Church/Synagogue/Mosque
    - Home
    - Elsewhere
  - Who will perform service
    - Funeral
    - Religious service
    - Memorial service
  - Special scripture, poetry, readings, etc.
  - Special items to be displayed (photographs, artwork, etc.)
  - Music
    - Congregational hymns
    - Soloists; musicians
    - Choir
    - Special instruments/tapes/CDs desired
    - Special hymns/songs

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- Pall Bearers/Honorary Pall Bearers/Flower Carriers
  - Number
  - Names/addresses/phone numbers
- Interment
  - Public/private graveside services
  - Masonic, fraternal order, veteran's, etc. services
    - Person or organization to contact
  - Cemetery/Mausoleum
    - Location
    - Prepaid plot
- Monument/marker
  - Style and type (for example: marble or granite; gray or brown; with urns or not)
  - Inscription
- Obituary notices
  - Biographical information
    - Date of birth, birthplace, parents
    - Spouse, friends, children
    - Education, work, achievements
    - Special acknowledgements to family friends or organizations
  - Newspapers to be sent notice
  - Persons and organizations to be notified

## **Location of Documents**

- Living will
- Medicaid and/or Medicare documents
- Life and health insurance policies; claim forms
- Wills and codicils
- Military discharge
- Professional certification(s)
- High school diploma, college diploma(s)
- Social Security card
- Motor vehicle titles and insurance documents
- Mortgages
- Real estate deeds
- Loans and installment purchase contracts
- Tax documents
  - Prior returns
  - Quarterly statements filed and payments made
  - Records to prepare return

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- Check book
- Savings account book
- Credit union account
- CDs, bonds, stock certificates, IRAs
- Birth certificate
- Marriage certificate
- Prepaid funeral plan
- Prepaid burial plot receipt
- Organ donation cards
- Body donation to science documents

## **Assets of Your Estate – Amounts, Location, and Location of Pertinent Documents**

- Insurance policies
- Bank accounts/credit union
- Safe deposit box and contents
- Bonds, stock certificates
- Real estate
- Personal property location: such as jewelry, antiques, automobiles, boats, silver, paintings
- Deposits – landlord, utility companies

## **Liabilities of Estate**

- Loans: auto, personal, educational, real estate.
  - Include the following information:
    - balance owed,
    - due date of payments,
    - loan number,
    - address to which payments are sent,
    - document location.
- Credit cards:
  - Include the following information:
    - type,
    - account number,
    - name to whom issued,
    - any passwords necessary to gain access to the account,
    - any insurance policies relating to the credit account.
- Installment purchases:

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- Include the following information:
  - item being purchased,
  - collateral pledged,
  - account number,
  - balance,
  - due date of payments,
  - address to which payments sent,
  - payment book.
  
- Credit life insurance:
  - contract location.

***THIS INFORMATION IS NOT LEGAL ADVICE. Legal advice is dependent upon the specific circumstances of each situation. Therefore, the information contained in this pamphlet cannot replace the advice of competent legal counsel.***

Free Legal information by Web and Phone: [www.vlas.org](http://www.vlas.org) and  
1-866-LegalAid (534-5243)

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