



Elder Law Month: Estate Planning Still Important to Seniors in Wake of COVID

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GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. – More than two years later, the country appears to finally have begun to emerge from the pandemic phase of COVID-19. However, the elderly continue to pay a heavy price. Despite being one of the most vaccinated groups, people aged 65 and older account for nearly 75 percent of U.S. COVID-related deaths according to a December 2021 *New York Times* article.

Older Americans continue to endure the isolation and fear associated with the pandemic, while millions of younger and middle-aged generations have gone back to school and work and have largely resumed somewhat normal lives. While the events of the last two years have certainly cast a light on the importance of being prepared, most still wait until it is far too late to begin planning.

May is National Elder Law/Older Americans Month which serves to raise awareness concerning elder abuse and neglect while also emphasizing the importance of being prepared. For seniors who have not done so, this is an ideal time to make sure they have committed their plans in a legally binding format.

“Why Plan? To empower and protect the ones you love”, says Foster Swift estate planning attorney Jonathan David. “You don’t want to leave behind a mess for your loved ones to sort through because of reasons such as thinking your assets are too small to warrant forming an estate plan or that it is simply “too soon” to talk about it. Like the title of my book says, you have to start planning before you can finish.”

To help seniors and family caregivers with the planning process, Foster Swift created an Elder Law & Estate Planning Resources landing page. This page is updated with links to videos, articles and podcasts on topics such as spotting red flags of elder abuse, a glossary of common estate planning terms and how employers can support employees that are taking care of elderly family members

ATTORNEYS

Jonathan J. David

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(fosterswift.com/f-elder-law-month.html).

Also featured on the page is a link to the firm's elder law blog (mielderlawblog.com), free downloadable tools created by Foster Swift to assist caregivers, and a copy of David's free e-book *Estate Planning: You Have to Start in Order to Finish*. This book is presented in a Q&A format on estate planning topics such as "Setting up a trust for children" and "What estate planning documents do you need".

Another tool included on the resource page in preparation should the worst happen, is a "Survivor's Checklist" of important steps that need to be addressed when a friend or family member passes away which can be an overwhelming process for the survivors.

Some steps are time-sensitive and the list breaks up the tasks into steps that should be done immediately after death such as:

- Notifying friends and family
- Securing decedent's vehicle, valuables and home
- Determining if the deceased left any instructions regarding funeral or burial arrangements

And into things that should be done after the funeral (so long as it isn't delayed) such as:

- Locating important papers including life insurance policies and legal documents such as a will and/or trust
- Locating the names and contact information of the decedent's professional advisors