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When Ian Burke, a Texas mail carrier, rushed to adopt Floyd—a 70-pound dog whose owner had died—he saved one pet from an uncertain fate, but thousands of others aren't so lucky. Read more...

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A Texas Mail Carrier's Act of Love Shows Why Your Pets Need a Plan Too

When Ian Burke, [a mail carrier from Destin, Texas](https://people.com/texas-mailman-adopts-surrendered-dog-from-old-route-11750805), heard that Floyd—a 70-pound dog he'd befriended on his delivery route—had ended up in a shelter after his owner's death, he didn't hesitate. Burke arrived at the City of Denton Animal Shelter before it opened to be first in line to adopt Floyd and give him a new home.

It's a heartwarming story with a happy ending, but it also highlights a sobering reality: Floyd was lucky. Thousands of pets aren't so fortunate when their owners pass away without making arrangements for their care. According to the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), [5.8 million dogs and cats](https://www.aspca.org/helping-shelters-people-pets/us-animal-shelter-statistics) entered animal shelters and rescue organizations in 2024, and many are there because their owners died or became incapacitated without a plan in place.

As touching as Burke's story is, Floyd's situation could have ended very differently. What if no one had stepped forward? What if Burke hadn't heard about Floyd's plight? This story serves as a powerful reminder that our beloved pets depend entirely on us—not just for their daily care, but for their future security. Let's explore why including your pets in your Life & Legacy Plan isn't just thoughtful—it's essential.

# The Reality Most Pet Owners Don't Consider

According to Burke, Floyd's owner was a Vietnam veteran who clearly loved and cherished his dog. Yet despite this strong relationship, Floyd still ended up in a shelter.

This scenario plays out across the country every day. Well-meaning pet owners assume that a family member will automatically step in to care for their animals, but this isn't always the case. Families might live far away, have allergies, rent properties that don't allow pets, or simply be unable to take on the financial responsibility of pet ownership. Even more challenging is that when families are grieving, they're often overwhelmed by legal processes they don't understand, leading to hasty decisions that leave beloved pets in uncertain situations.

Animals also grieve the loss of their owners and struggle with sudden changes in environment and routine. Floyd was fortunate that Burke acted quickly, but many pets experience weeks or months of uncertainty before finding new homes, if they find them at all. So what can you do to make sure your beloved pet is cared for by the people you want in the way you want?

# What to Do Instead

You might think that simply telling a family member, "Take care of Fluffy if something happens to me," is enough, but informalities often fail when put to the test. During times of grief and stress, verbal promises can be forgotten, circumstances can change, and family dynamics can complicate even the best intentions. Without clear legal guidance and a trusted advisor who understands you and your wishes, your pet could end up in a shelter, just like Floyd.

**Thoughtfully Choose and Prepare Your Pet’s Future Caregivers**

A comprehensive pet plan goes far beyond naming a caregiver within a set of documents. When you work with me, a Personal Family LawyerⓇ - a trusted advisor who takes time to understand you and your wishes for your pet’s care - I’ll support you to identify the right people to care for your pet, and prepare them so they know how to care for your pet in the way you want. I can also help you have honest conversations with your chosen caregivers about expectations, financial arrangements, and long-term commitments. Additionally, I’ll help you create contingency plans, including choosing backup caregivers in case your first choice is unavailable, or selecting a “first responder” who can be immediately available in the event of an emergency.

As a Personal Family Lawyer, I will be there for your loved ones after you die, to guide your chosen caregiver with care, so they can implement your wishes, rather than leaving them to figure out what to do and how. I will help make the process smooth and as easy as possible for them. And if I’m no longer living, I’ve created succession plans to ensure your loved ones will have the support they want and need.

**Consider the Practical Aspects That Are Often Overlooked**

Your plan should also include detailed and practical guidance that’s often overlooked by cheap legal plans, AI, financial advisors, and even traditional lawyers. This includes information about your pet's routine, dietary needs, medical history, behavioral quirks, and preferences. For instance, does your dog have specific walking routes or dog parks he enjoys? Does your cat need medication at certain times? What treats does your pet love, and what foods should be avoided? This information helps ensure continuity of care and reduces stress for both the pet and the new caregiver.

Other practical aspects to consider include providing your caregivers information about how to access veterinary records, vaccination schedules, microchip information, and pet insurance policies. Your chosen caregiver will also appreciate having details about your pet's daily routine, favorite toys, and comfort items that should accompany them to their new home.

Additionally, consider what you want to happen when your pet is approaching the end of their life. Having clear instructions for your pet’s caregiver about when and how to make these difficult decisions removes an enormous emotional burden from your caregiver and ensures your values guide these important choices.

Finally, a critical issue often overlooked is what happens if you’re incapacitated and can’t take care of your pet. If you become incapacitated, who will care for your pet during your recovery or long-term care? In an emergency, how will they access your home to retrieve pet supplies and comfort items? These practical considerations are often overlooked, but are crucial to ensure your pet is fed, watered, and walked.

A colleague of mine once saw a man rollerblading in a local park, and at high speed, he fell and suffered a head injury. Luckily, a neighbor walked by who knew the man and knew he had a dog, and was able to get inside the house and take the dog while his owner was taken to the hospital. But what if that neighbor hadn’t been there? How long would the dog have been alone, without food or water? Would the dog have lived much longer? It’s scary to think about.

**Make a Financial Plan for Your Pet’s Care**

According to a [report by Rover.com published this year](https://www.rover.com/blog/press-release/cost-of-pet-parenthood-2025/), the lifetime cost of owning a cat or dog is estimated to be $32,000-$35,000. Given that, not having a solid financial plan can make all the difference between your pet being cared for by the right person or ending up in a shelter. When you work with me, I’ll educate you about your options so your chosen caregiver has the resources they need. One option is creating a pet trust.

A pet trust offers two main benefits: it removes or lessens the financial burden a pet may place on a designated caretaker, whom may not be able to care for your pet otherwise, and it allows you to dictate, in enforceable and detailed terms, the type of care your pet will receive. Pet trusts can also specify how much money should be spent on routine care, medical expenses, and even end-of-life decisions. When you work with me, I will educate you so you know whether a pet trust makes sense for you and your pet. If not, I’ll support you to create the right financial plan for you.

# How Life & Legacy Planning Protects Your Beloved Pet

Unlike Life & Legacy Planning, traditional estate planning doesn’t take into account the personal guidance and support you need to ensure your pet is cared for the way you want. Traditional estate planning won’t provide your loved ones with guidance when something happens to you. And traditional estate planning is usually “one-size-fits-all,” meaning it may not include what your pet and caregiver need.

Traditional estate planning focuses only on creating a set of documents, like a will, trust, power of attorney, and healthcare directive (or, a “documents only plan”). That set of documents usually sits on a shelf and becomes outdated, and can fail, potentially resulting in your pet being taken to a shelter. Documents don’t provide care and human support for loved ones. And if you don’t have a trusted advisor looking out for you and staying in touch to ensure your plan stays up to date, it won’t work.

The difference between traditional estate planning and working with me to create your Life & Legacy Plan is that I build a lasting personal relationship with you, and one that extends support to your loved ones after you're gone. While many lawyers lose touch with clients once documents are signed (another feature of “documents-only” planning), I maintain an ongoing relationship, rooted in care, concern, and personal connection.

Finally, my Life & Legacy PlanningⓇ process includes ongoing reviews and updates to your plan as your life changes. I have systems in place to remind you, so you don’t need to remember to amend your plan on your own. If your pet’s designated caregiver moves away or your pet's needs evolve, we will catch it in time and adjust your plan so it doesn’t become outdated and fail. If your plan is updated when you die, your loved ones won't be struggling to figure out what to do —they'll have me to guide them through the process with care and support. And if I’m no longer living, I have plans in place to ensure continued care for your loved ones.

# Take Action for Your Pet's Future Today

Floyd's story ended happily because of one mail carrier's compassion and quick action, but your pet's future shouldn't depend on chance encounters and random acts of kindness. By including comprehensive pet planning in your Life & Legacy Plan, you can ensure that your beloved companion receives the care, love, and security they deserve, no matter what happens to you.

As a Personal Family Lawyer firm, I help you create a Life & Legacy Plan that protects every member of your family, including the four-legged ones. Unlike traditional lawyers who create documents and then move on to the next client, I understand that effective planning requires ongoing care and attention so it works when you need it to.

And when you're no longer here, your loved ones won't struggle to understand the legal process or wonder what you would have wanted for your pets. I will be there for them when they need guidance and care. This ongoing relationship is what transforms a simple set of documents into a plan that truly works, giving you peace of mind knowing all your loved ones, even the furry ones, will be protected and cared for. With Life & Legacy Planning, you can give your loved ones the greatest gift they could ever want: your lasting love and care.

Click here to schedule a complimentary 15-minute discovery call and learn how I can help you create a plan that protects everyone you love:

[Insert scheduling link]

###### This article is a service of [ name ], a Personal Family Lawyer Firm. We don’t just draft documents; we ensure you make informed and empowered decisions about life and death, for yourself and the people you love. That's why we offer a Life & Legacy Planning Session, during which you will get more financially organized than you’ve ever been before and make all the best choices for the people you love. You can begin by calling our office today to schedule a Life & Legacy Planning Session.

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