

First 30 Days After a Death in Pennsylvania

A compassionate guide to the immediate legal and practical steps

We understand this is an incredibly difficult time. This guide provides a clear, week-by-week outline of the most important steps so you can focus on what matters most — your family.

Week 1: Immediate Priorities

- Obtain the death certificate from the funeral home (request 10–15 certified copies)
- Locate the original will and any estate planning documents
- Notify immediate family members and close friends
- Secure the decedent's home, vehicles, and valuables
- Contact the decedent's employer regarding benefits, final paycheck, and life insurance
- Notify the Social Security Administration (SSA) — funeral homes often do this
- Contact the decedent's insurance agent (life, health, auto, homeowner's)

Week 2: Legal & Financial Steps

- Consult an attorney about probate and estate administration
- File the will with the Register of Wills in the county of residence
- Apply for Letters Testamentary or Letters of Administration
- Obtain an EIN (Employer Identification Number) from the IRS for the estate
- Open an estate bank account
- Notify banks, investment firms, and credit card companies
- Begin gathering asset and liability information for the inventory

Weeks 3–4: Notifications & Administration

- Publish the estate notice in a newspaper and the county legal journal
- Send written notice to known beneficiaries and creditors
- Redirect the decedent's mail to the executor or estate address
- Cancel or transfer utilities, subscriptions, and memberships
- Review and maintain insurance coverage on estate property
- Begin organizing financial records for tax filings
- File claims for any life insurance, retirement, or veterans benefits

Common Mistakes to Avoid

- Distributing assets before debts, taxes, and claims are settled
- Paying the decedent's personal bills from your own funds
- Closing accounts before obtaining proper documentation
- Throwing away financial records, mail, or documents
- Making major decisions about real property before consulting an attorney