

2025 Executor's Checklist: The First 48 Hours

A Guide for Southern California Families from the Law Offices of Rozsa Gyene
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When a loved one passes away, the legal and administrative clock starts immediately. In the first 48 hours, your primary duty is not to "settle" the estate, but to preserve it and ensure the safety of survivors. Use this roadmap to stay organized during this difficult time.

PHASE 1: THE FIRST 12 HOURS (Immediate Crisis Management)

- Obtain Legal Pronouncement of Death: If at home, call 911 or the hospice nurse. If in a hospital or nursing home, staff will handle this.
- Address Immediate Care: Arrange for the care of any minor children, elderly dependents, or pets. Ensure they are with a trusted family member.
- Organ Donation Check: Check the decedent's driver's license or Advance Healthcare Directive for organ donor status. If applicable, notify the hospital or hospice immediately.
- Notify Immediate Family: Call the closest relatives and the decedent's employer (if they were still working).

PHASE 2: HOURS 12–24 (Securing the Legacy)

- Secure the Property: Lock the house, vehicles, and any storage units. Do not allow anyone (including family) to remove items from the home yet.
- Find the Funeral Instructions: Search for a Will, Trust, or "Letter of Instruction" that may contain specific burial or cremation wishes.
- Contact a Funeral Home: Arrange for the transport of the body. You do not need to make final decisions yet; the immediate goal is safe transport.
- Protect Perishables: Empty the refrigerator and arrange for a neighbor to pick up the mail or water plants.

PHASE 3: HOURS 24–48 (Gathering the Paperwork)

- Locate the Original Will or Trust: Look in home safes, filing cabinets, or "the desk." If you cannot find it, contact their known estate planning attorney.
- Order Death Certificates: Request at least 10–15 certified copies. You will need these for every bank account, life insurance policy, and the Los Angeles County Registrar.
- Secure Digital Access: If you have access to their phone or computer, ensure they are plugged in and secure. Do not change passwords yet.
- Notify Professionals: Reach out to the decedent's Attorney, CPA, and Financial Advisor.

2025 LEGAL ALERT: What You Need to Know

- **The "Small Estate" Threshold:** As of April 1, 2025, California's small estate limit for primary residences has increased to \$750,000 (AB 2016). If the home is worth more than this (as most are in Glendale/Burbank), full probate may be required.
- **Social Security:** Most funeral homes will notify Social Security, but you must manually stop any automatic benefit payments to avoid the government clawing back funds later.
- **Do Not Pay Debts Yet:** You are not personally liable for the decedent's credit card or medical bills. Do not use your own money to pay estate debts until you have spoken with an attorney.

Your Next Step: Request a Probate Timeline Assessment

The Stanley Mosk Courthouse currently has an 18-month backlog. The faster you file, the faster you can access the estate's funds to pay for expenses.

Call (818) 291-6217 or visit livingtrust-attorneys.com to schedule your assessment today.

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