

Advance Directives

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Overview

A signed advance directive stored in a drawer protects no one. If the document cannot be located by your medical team during an emergency, or if it relies on vague instructions about avoiding “heroic measures,” it gives providers almost no actionable guidance when decisions must be made quickly.

An advance directive, sometimes called a living will, is a legal document that records your specific preferences for medical treatment in situations where you cannot communicate those preferences yourself. It addresses the questions at the core of end-of-life planning: whether you want mechanical ventilation, artificial nutrition, resuscitation efforts, or comfort care only. These are deeply personal decisions, and they deserve more precision than a generic hospital form can provide.

Cohen Cleary works with individuals across Massachusetts and Rhode Island to create advance directives that reflect actual treatment preferences, integrate with other planning documents, and remain accessible when they matter most.

How We Help Clients Create Effective Healthcare Directives

We tell our clients that the value of an advance directive is not in signing it. The value is in the specificity of the instructions and the certainty that the right people can access them at the right time.

Our attorneys draft advance directives that address concrete medical scenarios rather than relying on broad language that leaves providers guessing. This includes documenting preferences for cardiopulmonary resuscitation (including DNR orders), mechanical ventilation, intubation, artificial nutrition and hydration, dialysis, and palliative or comfort care measures. For clients with serious or terminal illness, we also address MOLST (Medical Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment), which, unlike a standard advance directive, produces physician-signed medical orders that emergency personnel are trained to follow.

Every advance directive we prepare is coordinated with the client’s health care proxy designation, ensuring that the person authorized to make decisions on your behalf understands the instructions you have documented. We also discuss practical access strategies, including registration with healthcare providers, copies for family members, and digital storage options, so the directive is available when it is needed. A medical directive attorney can help ensure your wishes are not only legally sound but clearly communicated to the people who need to act on them.

Why Clients Choose Cohen Cleary

At Cohen Cleary, our practice teams combine deep subject-matter experience with disciplined execution and responsive client service. We do not take a one-size-fits-all approach. Every matter is handled with careful preparation, clear communication, and a strategy tailored to the client's goals and the realities of the forum.

Clients choose Cohen Cleary because we deliver:

Practice-Focused Legal Experience

Our attorneys work in defined practice areas, allowing us to develop practical insight into the legal, procedural, and regulatory nuances that matter most in each case. This focus allows us to anticipate issues, avoid unnecessary delays, and position matters for efficient resolution.

Clear Guidance and Proactive Communication

We prioritize clarity at every stage. Clients receive straightforward explanations of their options, timely updates on developments, and practical advice grounded in real-world outcomes.

Strategic Advocacy with Trial Readiness

Whether a matter calls for negotiation, mediation, or litigation, our attorneys prepare every case with discipline and foresight. We pursue efficient resolution when possible and are fully prepared to advocate aggressively when necessary to protect our clients' interests.

Regional Knowledge and Local Presence

With offices throughout Massachusetts and experience across New England courts and agencies, we bring local insight and regional reach to every matter.

Client-Centered Service

We treat every matter with urgency and respect. Our clients rely on us for responsive service, sound judgment, and steady counsel through complex legal challenges.

In our estate planning and elder law work, this approach helps clients navigate healthcare planning decisions with clarity, efficiency, and confidence.

Our Approach to Advance Directive Planning

Most people treat advance directives as a checkbox item during estate planning. They sign a standard form, store it with their other documents, and assume the job is done. That assumption creates real risk.

Religious convictions, personal values, and specific medical conditions all shape what "acceptable treatment" means for a given individual. A form that uses generic language cannot capture those distinctions. We approach advance directive drafting as a conversation first and a legal document second, ensuring the final product reflects your actual wishes rather than a template's best guess.

Serving Clients Across Massachusetts and Rhode Island

Cohen Cleary prepares advance directives and related healthcare planning documents for clients throughout Massachusetts and Rhode Island, with offices in [Taunton](#) and [Plymouth](#). Our

estate planning attorneys are familiar with Massachusetts requirements for valid advance directives and MOLST documentation, as well as the practical realities of how these documents are received by hospitals and healthcare systems across Bristol County, Plymouth County, and Norfolk County. Whether you are working with a living will lawyer for the first time or updating an existing directive, we also have the capacity to serve clients across New England.

Schedule a Consultation With a Massachusetts Advance Directive Attorney

An advance directive only protects you if it is specific, current, and accessible. Contact Cohen Cleary to discuss your healthcare planning needs with an attorney who will ensure your wishes are documented with the precision they require. Call our [Taunton](#) or [Plymouth](#) office to schedule a consultation.

Frequently Asked Questions About Advance Directives

What is the difference between an advance directive and a health care proxy?

An advance directive documents your specific instructions for medical treatment, such as whether you want resuscitation, mechanical ventilation, or artificial nutrition. A health care proxy designates a specific person to make medical decisions on your behalf. The two documents serve different functions and work best together: the directive provides the instructions, and the proxy designates who carries them out if your directive does not address a particular situation.

Do I need an advance directive if I am young and healthy?

Yes. Incapacity can result from accidents, strokes, or sudden illness at any age. Without an advance directive, your family and medical team are left to make decisions without knowing your preferences. This often leads to disagreement among family members and treatment decisions that may not reflect what you would have chosen.

What is MOLST, and how does it differ from a standard advance directive?

MOLST stands for Medical Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment. Unlike an advance directive, which expresses preferences, a MOLST form produces physician-signed medical orders that emergency responders and healthcare facilities are trained to follow. MOLST is typically appropriate for individuals with serious illness or advanced frailty. It is not a substitute for an advance directive but rather a complement for those whose medical circumstances warrant immediate, actionable medical orders.

Can I change my advance directive after signing it?

Advance directives are not permanent. You can revoke or amend your directive at any time while you have capacity to do so. We encourage clients to review their directives periodically, particularly after a change in health status, a new diagnosis, or a significant life event. An outdated directive that no longer reflects your current wishes can create confusion for your healthcare team and your family.