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Many pets, when their owners die, get dumped into a local shelter, or, if lucky, placed with a rescue group. How can you be sure your pet will be cared for if you're no longer here to do it? It can be as simple as a few graphs in your will, or as complicated as an administered trust. Here are some tips to get you started:

- **Write a will.** Name a caretaker and leave that person a sum of money for pet care. It's the easiest, yet least secure way to protect your pets if you die. Select wisely, because the person you name isn't required to care for your pet. Make sure it's someone you trust who will actually carry out your request. Protecting your pets in a will costs as little as \$19.95.

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- **Establish a pet trust.** It's the only to ensure your pets will get the care you want. Georgia is one of only 11 states that do not have pet trust statutes, which make it easier to establish such trusts, but it can still be done. And it isn't cheap. Trusts can cost \$500 or more.

To establish a trust, you need to determine how much money it will cost to care for your pets for the rest of their lives. Then choose a guardian and a trustee, as well as a backup for each. The guardian will care for the pets and the trustee will dole out the money, forming a checks and balance system.

You also should name another person, or a charity, to receive whatever money is left over. This will help ensure the money is not wasted.

- **Protect pets if you're severely injured.** Consider a trust that kicks in if your incapacitated so that someone can provide care to your pets if you are hospitalized.

- **Make your wishes known.** Carry a card in your wallet with the name and phone number for your pet guardian and trustee. If anything happens, your pets will be cared for quickly.

- **Watch for change.** Attorneys with the state bar are working to rewrite the entire Trust Code for Georgia. A new code, expected to be submitted in the 2009 session of the Georgia General Assembly, would include a pet trust provision.

For more information on pets in wills: estateplanningforpets.org; humanesociety.org/petsinwills.

Here are a few local attorneys who do pet estate planning:

- Kristen Lewis, with Smith, Gambrell & Russell, www.sgrlaw.com, 404-815-3640.

- Lane & Karlo, Atlanta, 770-952-3388, www.GaPetTrust.com.

- Rose Drupiewski, Chamberlain, Hrdlicka, White, Williams & Martin, Atlanta. 404-658-5426.

- This Internet site sells wills, including one with pet provisions: www.itsmylife.com.

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