

## PUBLIC ADMINISTRATOR FAQs

### 1. What is involved in the probate of an estate?

Probate is started when someone – the named executor, next-of-kin, or the Public Administrator – files a petition to open a Probate proceeding with the Court.

1. The Court sets a hearing on the petition and determines who should be appointed to administer the decedent's estate. The Court issues Letters of Administration which constitute legal authority for the appointed personal representative to take over all aspects of the decedent's estate.
2. The personal representative will arrange for the funeral, if not already arranged, and collect for safekeeping of the decedent's assets, important documents and personal property. The personal representative also mails notices to family members, creditors and other interested parties, and a Court hearing may be conducted to resolve any questions or concerns about the assets and debts of the decedent's estate.
3. The personal representative evaluates claims against the decedent's estate, pays taxes, and expenses, sells assets as needed, determines who is entitled to the remaining estate, if any, and concludes all matters affecting the estate. The personal representative prepares a final accounting of actions taken to settle the decedent's estate, and files the accounting with the Court.
4. The Court will review and approve the final accounting. Once the accounting is approved, the personal representative is discharged and the Probate proceeding is concluded.

General timeframe for probating an estate: (see chart below)

Decedent passes away. Case is reported to the Public Administrator. An investigation is opened.

Probating an estate	Projected timeframe
Public Administrator's investigation complete:	30 to 60 days
Court hearing on Petition for Probate:	3 to 6 months
Estate's administration:	6 months to 3 years – depending on complexity

Accounting approved by the Court:	3 to 6 months
Distribution after Court approves accounting:	1 to 2 months

## 2. Who is the Public Administrator?

The Public Administrator is a branch of the Department of the Treasurer Tax Collector for Los Angeles County, responsible for investigating, managing, and administering certain cases of deceased Los Angeles County residents.

The Public Administrator has the legal authority to take protective custody of property of a decedent, and to investigate the decedent's assets, obligations, and locate the decedent's family. The Public Administrator may open probate for the decedent's estate, or refer the estate to the appropriate person(s) for administration.

## 3. When is an estate handled by the Public Administrator?

The Probate Court may appoint the Public Administrator under the following circumstances:

1. When no executor, personal representative or administrator has been appointed and the decedent's property is uncared for, or subject to loss, injury or waste;
2. When ordered by the Court;
3. When an heir nominates the Public Administrator, or the decedent's Will names the Public Administrator as executor;
4. When there are no known heirs of the decedent's estate;
5. When an heir who resides outside of the State of California requests the Public Administrator to administrate the decedent's estate;
6. When the named Executor fails to act and no other person has a preferred right.

## 4. How much are the fees of the Public Administrator?

The California Probate Code provides for statutory fees for executors, administrators and their attorneys. The Public Administrator and attorneys for the Public Administrator are each entitled to the same compensation, based on the value of the estate. Statutory fees for both the Public Administrator and the attorneys are one time fees, deducted prior to the estate's distribution, after the conclusion of the administration, and calculated as follows:

- 4% of the first \$100,000
- 3% of the next \$100,000

2% of the next \$800,000

1% of all above \$9 million

0.5% of the next \$15 million

Above \$25 million dollars, an amount determined by the Court

In addition to statutory fees, the Court upon request, may award extraordinary fees for such extra work as selling real and personal property, petitioning for determination of heirship, litigation to collect assets, and defending actions against the estate and other similar matters. All fees must be approved by the Court, in the final accounting.

### **5. What is the difference between a regular Probate proceeding and a Summary Probate proceeding?**

There are two different Probate proceedings in California. Each proceeding is determined by the total value of the decedent's estate.

1. A regular Probate proceeding is supervised by the Court and generally applies to decedent estates with a value exceeding \$150,000, at the time of death.
2. Summary Probate proceedings are only conducted by the Public Administrator, with limited or no Court supervision, when the total value of the decedent's estate does not exceed \$150,000.

### **6. Is the Public Administrator bonded? What is the cost of the bond?**

Yes. The purpose of the bond is to protect the beneficiaries or creditors of the estate from harm caused by the mismanagement or misconduct of the administrator.

Per California Probate Code Section 7621, every estate shall be charged an annual bond fee in the amount of twenty-five dollars (\$25) plus one-fourth of one percent of the amount of an estate greater than ten thousand dollars (\$10,000). The amount charged is an expense of the estate.

### **7. If the Public Administrator is handling the estate, am I required as an heir, to hire an attorney to represent my interests?**

No. Hiring an attorney is not required. However, if your right to repayment of a debt or to inherit is not clear, or substantial claims impacting the value of the estate have been filed, you may consider retaining legal counsel to represent your interests. The fees for representation are a matter for private agreement between you and your attorney and are normally not paid from the estate.

### **8. Does the Public Administrator conduct a thorough investigation to discover all estate assets?**

Yes. The Public Administrator's staff search through the decedent's residence, car, mail, safe deposit boxes, and storage units, looking for all leads to the decedent's assets.

This includes contacting the decedent's friends, family members, and associates. These leads are followed up in due course, and assets are collected. All assets are usually located before the close of the probate proceeding.

### **9. Can the Public Administrator make funeral arrangements?**

Yes. The Public Administrator, as Administrator of the estate, may make necessary funeral arrangements, either at the family's request or in the absence of relatives or heirs.

Arrangements will be made commensurate with any pre-need (pre-arranged) plans of the decedent or the ability of the estate to pay. All deceased persons will be afforded a dignified burial when possible.

### **10. What is a Creditor's Claim?**

If you paid the debts/expenses of the decedent or incurred charges directly connected with the decedent's death, including funeral expenses, immediately notify the personal representative. You may be a creditor of the estate. Creditors must file a Creditor's Claim with documents supporting the claim within four (4) months after the appointment of the estate's Personal representative or administrator. Creditor's Claim forms may be obtained here <http://www.courts.ca.gov/forms.htm?filter=DE>.

### **11. When will claims be paid?**

Creditor's claims are paid when sufficient estate funds are available. If a funeral director or mortuary is contacting family members or heirs for payment, they should be referred to the Personal representative. The estate may reimburse reasonable funeral expenses.

### **12. If the estate has insufficient funds to pay all claims, are some claims paid?**

When an estate has insufficient funds to satisfy the decedent's debts, claims are paid on a priority basis with debts owed to the U.S. or the State having first preference. Thereafter, claims are paid on a prorated basis. For details relating to priority of debt payment, see Probate Code section 11420.

### **13. While the estate is in administration, is the money in the estate earning interest?**

Yes. The Public Administrator maintains all estate funds in an interest earning trust fund, managed by the County Treasurer.

### **14. What inheritance taxes or estate taxes will the estate have to pay?**

Federal estate taxes, both the rate and the exclusions, are determined by the year the decedent died. There are no inheritance taxes in California.

### **15. Who files the tax returns for a decedent's estate?**

The Personal representative files the tax returns for a decedent's estate. When the Public Administrator is the Administrator of an estate, the Public Administrator will file the estate's tax returns.

### **16. Can you give me the exact financial status of the estate?**

Yes. After the final accounting is complete. A final accounting will be filed with the Court prior to the distribution of the estate. If you call the Public Administrator prior to the filing of the final accounting, the Public Administrator can only provide an estimated value of the estate or an heir's share of the estate.

### **17. Will I receive regular reports on the progress of the estate?**

Yes. If you are an heir, beneficiary, legatee, executor, or interested party, you may contact the Public Administrator's staff at [\(213\) 974-0404](tel:2139740404).

### **18. How can I get a copy of the death certificate?**

Certified copies of the death certificate may be obtained by contacting the County of Los Angeles Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk by phone at [\(800\) 201-8999](tel:8002018999) or by visiting their website at <https://www.lavote.net/home/records>. The website accepts online requests, and provides addresses of local offices and office hours.

### **19. How long does it take to administer an estate?**

The timeline for estate administration varies greatly depending on the complexity of the estate as well as the availability of the Courts. An estate's administration takes at least 12 – 24 months or longer to complete.

### **20. Why is estate property sold?**

Estate property is sold to satisfy estate debts and costs of administration. Personal and real property sales are governed by the Probate Code. Probate assets are appraised by a Court-appointed appraiser. Personal property is sold at auction by open bid to the highest bidder. Securities are sold without notice. Real property is sold at auction or by private sale after notice of sale and subject to confirmation by the Court.

The Public Administrator communicates with known heirs to determine the desired disposition of property, when there are sufficient proceeds to pay debts and costs. Some personal property items may be distributed directly to heirs. The value of the item is deducted from the receiving heir's share. Heirs may also attend auctions and purchase any items from the estate.

Real property (homes, condominiums, vacant land, commercial property, oil & mineral rights) may also be sold to satisfy estate debts and costs of administration. In the event the estate has sufficient cash to satisfy estate debts and costs and an heir desires to retain the real property, the heir should speak directly with the Public Administrator's staff to formalize an agreement.

## **21. Can the Public Administrator staff buy estate property?**

No. Employees of the Department of the Treasurer Tax Collector and members of their immediate family shall not participate in the auctions conducted by the Public Administrator.

## **22. When and where are the Personal Property Auctions?**

Public auctions are generally held on the second Saturday of each month, approximately 7 – 8 times a calendar year. Individuals who wish to obtain auction dates, subscribe to the auctioneer's email list, preview information regarding upcoming personal property auctions, or obtain the terms and conditions, may go to the auctioneer's website at [cwsmarketing.com](http://cwsmarketing.com) and click on the County of Los Angeles seal. The auctioneer can be reached by telephone at (571) 364-7331. You may also call the Public Administrator's warehouse at [\(626\) 336-2364](tel:6263362364), from 7:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., Pacific Time, Monday through Friday, for auction dates and other information. The warehouse is not open to the public outside of auction dates, and viewing of property for sale is not allowed on non-auction days.

Auctions are held at the Public Administrator's warehouse located at:

16610 Chestnut Street  
City of Industry, CA 91748  
[\(626\) 336-2364](tel:6263362364)

Auction items are available for preview on the day of the auction from 7:30 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. The auction starts at 9:00 a.m. and continues until all items are sold, concluding at approximately 3:00 p.m., Pacific Time.

Items are sold "as is, where is". Payment for items purchased must be received and items must be removed from the warehouse premises the same day.

Interested bidders are required to deposit \$100 to obtain a bidder's paddle. The balance of the deposit less any purchases will be returned to the bidder after the auction. A 15% buyer's premium and sales tax are charged by the auctioneer on all purchases.

For additional information regarding personal property auctions, please visit the auctioneer's FAQ page on their website at [cwsmarketing.com](http://cwsmarketing.com).

Employees of the Department of the Treasurer Tax Collector and members of their immediate family shall not participate in the auctions conducted by the Public Administrator.

### **23. When and where are the Real Property Auctions?**

The Public Administrator auctions approximately 125 parcels of improved and unimproved real properties each year. Auctions are generally held on the third weekend of the month, approximately 7 – 10 times per year, depending on the inventory of real property available for sale. For auction dates, subscribing to the auctioneer's email list, previewing properties in upcoming auctions, information on Court hearings for auctioned properties, or obtaining the terms and conditions of auction sales, contact Richard "Rhett" Winchell at [\(310\) 871-0000](tel:3108710000), from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. daily, by email at [BDKW@kennedywilson.com](mailto:BDKW@kennedywilson.com), or through the Kennedy Wilson website at [BDKW.com](http://BDKW.com)

Auctions are held on site at each property being sold. During a weekend auction, the auctioneer drives in a caravan from property to property. Bidders may obtain a brochure which describes the time, date, and location of auction for each parcel. The brochure is available at the website, [BDKW.com](http://BDKW.com).

Bidders must bring a \$5,000 Cashier's Check, payable to Kennedy-Wilson, and a personal check for the balance of the required 10% deposit, to the auction. All properties are sold "as is, where is", by the Public Administrator's auctioneer.

Please note *all* auction sales are subject to a Court confirmation hearing 45 – 60 days after auction before escrow can commence. Court confirmation hearings are held at the Los Angeles Superior Court, Probation Division, located at:

111 N. Hill Street  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

At Court confirmation hearings, the judge will usually reopen the auction process by asking for overbids from those attending the hearing. It is possible that the successful bidder at the auction is overbid by someone else, and the property is sold to the overbidder. Before bidding at auction, or overbidding at the Court confirmation hearing, one should carefully read all terms and conditions listed in the auction brochure, which can be obtained from the Public Administrator's office located at 320 West Temple Street, 9th Floor, Los Angeles, CA 90012, from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, Pacific Time, or from Kennedy–Wilson's website at [BDKW.com](http://BDKW.com).

For additional information regarding real property auctions, please visit the auctioneer's website [BDKW.com](http://BDKW.com).

Employees of the Department of the Treasurer Tax Collector and members of their immediate family shall not participate in the auctions conducted by the Public Administrator.

## 24. When will the estate be distributed?

Estate distribution will occur upon completion and approval of the final accounting. The Public Administrator maintains all estate funds in insured interest bearing accounts until needed to pay claims and other expenses of the estate. All assets are safeguarded in the Public Administrator's secure warehouse and/or vault until sold or distributed.

## 25. Will I receive a statement of all receipts and disbursements?

Upon request, a final accounting, detailing all receipts and disbursements is available.

## 26. PROBATE TERMS (GLOSSARY)

Here are some important probate terms you'll want to know:

- **Decedent (or deceased):** The person who died.
- **Beneficiary:** A person designated by the decedent who inherits under a Will.
- **Administrator:** The person responsible for overseeing the distribution of the estate, and may also be referred to as the "Personal representative".
- **Creditor's Claim:** A written claim filed by a person or entity owed money by a decedent.
- **Court:** The Los Angeles Superior Court, Probate Division.
- **Custodian of the Will:** The individual who has the physical possession of the Will when the individual who wrote the Will dies.
- **Decedent's estate:** All the property (home and/or personal effects) that a person owned at the time of death.
- **Executor:** A person named in a Will and appointed by the Court to carry out the decedent's wishes written in the Will.
- **Heir:** A person recognized by law, who inherits when there is no Will.
- **In-kind:** The distribution of a particular asset to a beneficiary.
- **Intestate:** When someone dies without leaving a Will.
- **Intestate succession:** The order in which heirs inherit the decedent's estate when a person dies without a Will.
- **Interested parties:** Persons who have requested notice for Court proceedings for an estate administration.
- **Legatees, or devisees:** This is another term for Beneficiary.
- **Next-of-kin:** Family members, who are in the closest relationship to the decedent.
- **Personal property:** Items owned by the decedent at time of death, such as cash, stocks, jewelry, clothing, furniture, or cars.
- **Personal representative:** Individual(s) responsible for overseeing the distribution of the estate. The individual(s) may also be called the Administrator(s).
- **Probate proceeding:** The legal process of deciding where, how, and to whom to distribute the decedent's estate, supervised by the Court and generally applies to decedent estates with a value exceeding \$150,000, at the time of death.

- **Public Administrator (PA):** A branch of the Department of the Treasurer Tax Collector for Los Angeles County, responsible for investigating, managing, and administering certain cases of deceased Los Angeles County residents.
- **Real property:** Buildings and land, including the residence owned by the decedent at the time of death.
- **Summary proceeding:** Transfer of a decedent's assets without Court supervision. Summary proceedings are only conducted by the Public Administrator, with limited or no Court supervision, where the total value of the decedent's estate does not exceed \$150,000.
- **Testate:** When someone dies leaving a Will.
- **Trust:** When a person (trustee) holds property at another person's (settlor's) request for the benefit of someone else (beneficiary).
- **Will:** A legal document that lists a person's wishes about what will happen to his/her estate after death.