

Uniform Real Property Transfer on Death Act

Asset-specific mechanisms for the non-probate transfer of property to a beneficiary at death are now common. The proceeds of life insurance policies and pension plans, securities registered in transfer on death (TOD) form, and funds held in payable on death (POD) bank accounts, are examples of personal property that can be automatically transferred to a named beneficiary. Millions of Americans have benefitted from this trend in modern law to recognize and support the use of non-probate transfers. However, until recently there was no similarly straightforward, inexpensive, and reliable means of passing real estate directly to a beneficiary at death outside of the probate process. This was a significant gap in the law; for many people in low- and middle-income families a home is the single most valuable asset in their estate.

The Uniform Real Property Transfer on Death Act (URPTODA) was first approved by the Uniform Law Commission in 2009. URPTODA enables an owner to pass real property to a beneficiary at the owner's death simply, directly, and without probate by executing and recording a TOD deed. Just as importantly, URPTODA permits the owner to retain all ownership rights in the property while living, including the right to sell the property, revoke the deed, or name a different beneficiary.

Key elements of URPTODA include:

- The TOD deed is not subject to the statute of wills and passes title directly to the named beneficiary without probate.
- The TOD deed must contain all of the essential elements and formalities of any other properly recordable deed.
- The TOD deed must be signed by the transferor and properly recorded during the transferor's lifetime in the office of the recorder of deeds where the property is located.
- The capacity required to create a TOD deed is the same as the capacity to make a will.
- A TOD deed does not operate until the transferor's death and remains revocable until then. The transferor may revoke the deed by recording a revocatory instrument such as a direct revocation of the TOD deed, or a subsequent TOD deed that names a different beneficiary. If the transferor sells the property while living, the TOD deed is ineffective.
- Until the transferor's death, a recorded TOD deed has no effect — it does not affect any right or interest of the transferor or any other person in the property. The TOD deed creates no legal or equitable interest in the designated beneficiary; it does not affect the designated beneficiary's eligibility for public assistance; it does not subject the property to the designated beneficiary's creditors.
- At the time of the transferor's death, title to the property is transferred automatically to the beneficiary, subject to any conveyances, encumbrances, assignments, liens, or other interests in the property. In other words, the beneficiary receives only the interest that the transferor owned at the time of death, and the holders of any security interests in the property are protected.
- The beneficiary is liable for claims against the transferor's estate only when the estate is insolvent.
- The beneficiary may disclaim all or part of the transferred interest in the same manner as state law permits for any other testamentary devise.
- URPTODA includes optional TOD deed and revocation forms that each state legislature may choose whether to enact.