

# New POLST Program Raises Awareness About End-Of-Life Decisions

**By Matthew Crider, JD  
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A [recent article in the Wall Street Journal](#) shines the light on a new program being instituted by a growing number of states called “Physician-Orders for Life Sustaining Treatment,” or POLST. “A POLST, which is signed by both the patient and the doctor, spells out such choices as whether a patient wants to be on a mechanical breathing machine or feeding tube and receive antibiotics.”

Creating a POLST is an important step toward getting the care and medical treatment you want at a time when you may no longer be able to communicate those wishes to your family or medical staff. As estate planners we know just how important it is to communicate these preferences for health care; in fact, creating an estate plan with our office includes drafting a document called an advance directive, in which you specify which medical treatments or interventions you would or would not like, and more importantly, it is the document in which you nominate a health care agent to serve as your proxy if and when you are unable to speak for yourself.

Keep in mind that although the POLST is an important step in making your wishes known, the POLST is not intended to replace an advance directive. The POLST programs “are meant to complement advance directives, sometimes known as living wills, in which people state in broad terms how much medical intervention they will want when their condition no longer allows them to communicate.”

The WSJ article states that “A study supported by the National Institutes of Health last year found that patients with POLST forms were more likely to have treatment preferences documented than patients who used traditional documents such as living wills and do-not-resuscitate orders.” This comes as no surprise, considering that executing a POLST includes getting the document signed by your doctor, thus ensuring that your doctor is not only aware that you’ve expressed your wishes for end-of-life care, but has also likely had a part in helping you understand exactly what your options are.

Our office recommends that our clients go one step further—in addition to having your doctor sign your POLST, give your doctor a copy of your advance directive as well. Once you have things squared away with your doctor we also recommend sending a copy of your POLST and your advance directive to the person you’ve named as your healthcare agent.

The more informed your doctors and family are about your wishes for end-of-life care, the more likely it is that you will receive the treatment you prefer.

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## About Matthew Crider, J.D.

Matthew Crider formed [Crider Law PC](http://www.criderlaw.net) in 1999 so he could help individuals and business owners by providing creative solutions and be their trusted advisor and legal counselor. He serves his clients by listening closely to their goals, dreams and concerns and working with them to develop superior and comprehensive estate and asset protection plans. His estate planning practice focuses on preserving and growing wealth by providing comprehensive, highly personalized estate planning counsel to couples, families, individuals and businesses.

