

## CHAPTER 854

## TRANSFERS AT DEATH — GENERAL RULES

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**854.01 Definitions.** In this chapter:

(1) “Extrinsic evidence” means evidence that would be inadmissible under the common law parole evidence rule or a similar doctrine because the evidence is not contained in the governing instrument to which it relates.

(2) “Governing instrument” means a will; a deed; a trust instrument; an insurance or annuity policy; a contract; a pension, profit-sharing, retirement, or similar benefit plan; a marital property agreement under s. 766.58 (3) (f); a beneficiary designation under s. 40.02 (8) (a); an instrument under ch. 705; an instrument that creates or exercises a power of appointment; or any other dispositive, appointive, or nominative instrument that transfers property at death.

(3) “Revocable,” with respect to a disposition, provision, or nomination, means one under which the decedent, at the time referred to, was alone empowered, by law or under the governing instrument, to change or revoke, regardless of whether the decedent was then empowered to designate himself or herself in place of a former designee, and regardless of whether the decedent then had the capacity to exercise the power.

**History:** 1997 a. 188; 2005 a. 216 ss. 89, 90, 144.

**854.02 Scope.** This chapter applies to all statutes and governing instruments that transfer property at death.

**History:** 1997 a. 188.

Wisconsin’s New Probate Code. Erlanger. Wis. Law. Oct. 1998.

**854.03 Requirement of survival by 120 hours.**

(1) **REQUIREMENT OF SURVIVAL.** Except as provided in sub. (5), if property is transferred to an individual under a statute or under a provision in a governing instrument that requires the individual to survive an event and it is not established that the individual survived the event by at least 120 hours, the individual is considered to have predeceased the event.

(2) **CO-OWNERS WITH RIGHT OF SURVIVORSHIP.** (a) In this subsection, “co-owners with right of survivorship” includes joint tenants, owners of survivorship marital property and other co-owners of property or accounts that are held under circumstances that entitle one or more persons to all of the property or account upon the death of one or more of the others.

(b) Except as provided in sub. (5), if property is transferred under a governing instrument that establishes 2 or more co-owners with right of survivorship, and if at least one of the co-owners did not survive the others by at least 120 hours, the property is transferred to the co-owners in proportion to their ownership interests.

(3) **MARITAL PROPERTY.** Except as provided in subs. (4) and (5), if a husband and wife die leaving marital property and it is not established that one survived the other by at least 120 hours, 50

percent of the marital property shall be distributed as if it were the husband’s individual property and the husband had survived, and 50 percent of the marital property shall be distributed as if it were the wife’s individual property and the wife had survived.

(4) **LIFE INSURANCE.** Except as provided in sub. (5), if the insured and the beneficiary under a policy of life or accident insurance have both died and it is not established that one survived the other by at least 120 hours, the proceeds of the policy shall be distributed as if the insured had survived the beneficiary. If the policy is the marital property of the insured and of the insured’s spouse and there is no alternative beneficiary except the estate or the personal representative of the estate, the proceeds shall be distributed as marital property in the manner provided in sub. (3).

(5) **EXCEPTIONS.** (am) This section does not apply if any of the following conditions applies:

1. The statute or governing instrument requires the individual to survive an event by a specified period.

2. The statute or governing instrument indicates that the individual is not required to survive an event by any specified period.

3. The statute or governing instrument deals with simultaneous deaths or deaths in a common disaster and the provision is relevant to the facts.

4. The imposition of a 120-hour survival requirement would cause a nonvested property interest or a power of appointment to fail to be valid, or to be invalidated, under s. 700.16 or under the rule against perpetuities of the applicable jurisdiction.

5. The application of this section to more than one statute or governing instrument would result in an unintended failure or unintended duplication of a transfer.

6. The application of this section would result in the escheat of an intestate estate under s. 852.01 (3).

7. The statute or governing instrument specifies that this statute, or one similar to it, does not apply.

8. The imposition of a 120-hour survival requirement would be administratively cumbersome and would not change the identity of the ultimate beneficiaries of the property or the property that each beneficiary would receive.

(bm) If the transfer is made under a governing instrument and the person who executed the governing instrument had an intent contrary to any provision in this section, then that provision is not applicable to the transfer. Extrinsic evidence may be used to construe the intent.

(6) **EVIDENTIARY STANDARD.** Unless the statute or governing instrument provides otherwise, proof that an individual survived the period required under subs. (1) to (4) must be by clear and convincing evidence.

**History:** 1997 a. 188; 2005 a. 216.

**854.04 Representation; per stirpes; modified per stirpes; per capita at each generation; per capita.** (1) BY REPRESENTATION OR PER STIRPES. (a) Except as provided in subs. (5) and (6), if a statute or a governing instrument calls for property to be distributed to the issue or descendants of a designated person “by representation,” “by right of representation,” or “per stirpes,” the property is divided into equal shares for the designated person’s surviving children and for the designated person’s deceased children who left surviving issue. Each surviving child and each deceased child who left surviving issue are allocated one share.

(b) The share of each deceased child allocated a share under par. (a) is divided among that person’s issue in the same manner as under par. (a), repeating until the property is fully allocated among surviving issue.

(2) MODIFIED PER STIRPES. (a) Except as provided in subs. (5) and (6), if a statute or a governing instrument calls for property to be distributed to the issue or descendants of a designated person by “modified per stirpes,” the property is divided into equal shares at the generation nearest to the designated person that contains one or more surviving issue. Each survivor and each deceased person in that same generation who left surviving issue are allocated one share.

(b) The share of each deceased person allocated a share in par. (a) is divided among that person’s issue in the same manner as under par. (a), repeating until the property is fully allocated.

(3) PER CAPITA AT EACH GENERATION. (a) Except as provided in subs. (5) and (6), if a statute or a governing instrument calls for property to be distributed to the issue or descendants of a designated person “per capita at each generation,” the property is divided into equal shares at the generation nearest to the designated person that contains one or more surviving issue. Each survivor in that generation and each deceased person in that generation who left surviving issue are allocated one share. The shares of the deceased persons in that same generation who left surviving issue are combined for allocation under par. (b).

(b) The combined share created under par. (a) is divided among the surviving issue of the persons whose shares were combined in the same manner as under par. (a), as though all of those issue were the issue of one person. The process is repeated until the property is fully allocated.

(4) PER CAPITA. Except as provided in sub. (6), if a statute or governing instrument calls for property to be distributed to a group or class “per capita”, the property is divided into as many shares as there are surviving members of the group or class, and each member is allocated one share.

(5) CERTAIN INDIVIDUALS DISREGARDED. For the purposes of subs. (1) to (3), all of the following apply:

(a) An individual who is deceased and who left no surviving issue is disregarded.

(b) An individual who has a surviving ancestor who is an issue of the designated person is not allocated a share.

(6) CONTRARY INTENT. If the transfer is made under a governing instrument and the person who executed the governing instrument had an intent contrary to any provision in this section, then that provision is not applicable to the transfer. Extrinsic evidence may be used to construe the intent.

**History:** 1997 a. 188; 2005 a. 216.

A will clause providing for “equal shares to the then living issue of donor’s three daughter–beneficiaries in this trust, and/or the then living issue of any deceased issue of donor’s three daughter–beneficiaries, by right of representation” required distribution per capita among the grandchildren and by representation among their children. In re Bowler Trust, 56 Wis. 2d 171, 201 N.W.2d 573 (1972).

**NOTE:** The preceding case was decided prior to the adoption of 1997 Wis. Act 188, which made extensive revisions to the Wisconsin Probate Code.

#### 854.05 No exoneration of encumbered property.

(1) DEFINITIONS. In this section:

(a) “Debt” includes accrued interest on the debt.

(b) “Encumbrance” includes mortgages, liens, pledges and other security agreements that are encumbrances on property.

(2) GENERALLY. (a) Except as provided in sub. (5), all property that is specifically transferred by a governing instrument shall be assigned to the transferee without exoneration of a debt that is secured by an encumbrance on the property.

(b) If the debt that is secured by the encumbrance on the property is paid in whole or in part out of other assets, the specifically transferred property shall be assigned to the transferee only if any of the following applies:

1. The transferee contributes to the person or entity that held the assets that were used to pay the debt an amount equal to the amount that was paid.

2. The person or entity secures the amount described in subd. 1. through a new encumbrance on the property.

(3) JOINT TENANCY; SURVIVORSHIP MARITAL PROPERTY. Except as provided in sub. (5), if all or part of a debt that is secured by an encumbrance on property in which the decedent at the time of death had an interest as a joint tenant or as a holder of survivorship marital property is paid out of other assets as the result of a claim being allowed, the person or entity that makes the payment is subrogated to all rights that the claimant had against the property.

(4) INSURANCE. Except as provided in sub. (5), if all or part of a debt that is secured by an encumbrance on the proceeds payable under a life insurance policy in which the decedent was the named insured is paid out of other assets as the result of a claim being allowed, the person or entity that makes the payment is subrogated to all rights that the claimant had against the proceeds.

(5) CONTRARY INTENT. (a) If the person who executed the governing instrument had an intent contrary to any provision in this section, then that provision is not applicable to the transfer. Extrinsic evidence may be used to construe the intent.

(b) A general directive to pay debts does not give rise to a presumption of exoneration.

**History:** 1997 a. 188; 2005 a. 216.

**854.06 Predeceased transferee.** (1) DEFINITIONS. In this section:

(a) “Provision in a governing instrument” includes all of the following:

1. A gift to an individual whether or not the individual is alive at the time of the execution of the instrument.

2. A share in a class gift only if a member of the class dies after the execution of the instrument.

3. An appointment by the decedent under any power of appointment, unless the issue who would take under this section could not have been appointees under the terms of the power.

(c) “Stepchild” means a child of the decedent’s surviving, deceased or former spouse, and not of the decedent.

(2) SCOPE OF COVERAGE. This section applies to revocable provisions in a governing instrument executed by the decedent that provide for an outright transfer upon the death of the decedent to any of the following persons:

(a) A grandparent of the decedent, or issue of a grandparent, subject to s. 854.21.

(b) A stepchild of the decedent, subject to s. 854.15.

(3) SUBSTITUTE GIFT TO ISSUE OF COVERED TRANSFEREE. Subject to sub. (4), if a transferee under a provision described in sub. (2) does not survive the decedent but has issue who do survive, the issue of the transferee take the transfer per stirpes, as provided in s. 854.04 (1).

(4) CONTRARY INTENT. (a) Subsection (3) does not apply if any of the following applies:

1. The governing instrument provides that a transfer to a predeceased beneficiary lapses.

2. The governing instrument designates one or more persons, classes, or groups of people as contingent transferees, in which case those transferees take in preference to those under sub. (3). But if none of the contingent transferees survives, sub. (3) applies to the first group in the sequence of contingent transferees that has

one or more transferees specified in sub. (2) who left surviving issue.

(bm) If the person who executed the governing instrument had an intent contrary to any provision in this section, then that provision is not applicable to the transfer. Extrinsic evidence may be used to construe the intent.

**History:** 1997 a. 188; 2005 a. 216.

A will clause providing that if any beneficiary dies within 5 months of the testator, the deceased beneficiary's share is to be treated as if the beneficiary predeceased the testator, served to pass a deceased beneficiary's share to her children under the anti-lapse statute. *Firehammer v. Marchant*, 224 Wis. 2d 673, 591 N.W.2d 898 (Ct. App. 1999), 98–0586.

**854.07 Failed transfer and residue.** (1) Except as provided in sub. (4) and s. 854.06, if an attempted transfer under a governing instrument fails, the attempted transfer becomes part of the residue of the governing instrument. This subsection does not apply if the attempted transfer is itself a residuary transfer.

(2) Except as provided in sub. (4) and s. 854.06, if the residue of a governing instrument is to be transferred to 2 or more persons, the share of a residuary transferee that fails passes to the other residuary transferees in proportion to the interest of each in the remaining part of the residue.

(3) If a governing instrument other than a will does not effectively dispose of an asset that is governed by the instrument, that asset shall be paid or distributed to the transferor's probate estate.

(4) If the person who executed the governing instrument had an intent contrary to any provision in this section, then that provision is inapplicable to the transfer. Extrinsic evidence may be used to construe the intent.

**History:** 1997 a. 188; 2005 a. 216.

Under a will leaving "my homestead which I occupy at the time of my death" to a son, the home in which the testator lived when the will is executed should be awarded to the son even though the testator became ill and was confined to a nursing home for a year prior to his death and the home was rented. *Estate of Gotthart*, 56 Wis. 2d 563, 202 N.W.2d 397 (1972).

The testator's spouse inherited the residue when a purported residuary clause made only specific and general bequests and did not make a dispositive provision for distribution of the residue. To read into a will a gift by implication, it is necessary to first find a positive, disposing intent based on a contingency that did not occur. Then it is possible, if the facts warrant it, to imply the same intent concerning the contingency which did occur but which was not accounted for in the will. In *Matter of Estate of McWilliams*, 78 Wis. 2d 328, 254 N.W.2d 277 (1977).

**NOTE:** The preceding cases were decided prior to the adoption of 1997 Wis. Act 188, which made extensive revisions to the Wisconsin Probate Code.

**854.08 Nonademption of specific gifts in certain cases.** (1) **ABROGATION OF COMMON LAW.** The common law doctrine of ademption by extinction, as it might otherwise apply to the situations governed by this section, is abolished.

(2) **PROCEEDS OF SALE.** (a) Subject to sub. (6), if property that is the subject of a specific gift is sold by the person who executed the governing instrument within 2 years of the person's death, the specific beneficiary has the right to the following amounts if available under the governing instrument:

1. Any balance of the purchase price unpaid at the time of death, including any security interest in the property and interest accruing before death, together with the incidents of the specific gift.

2. A general pecuniary transfer equivalent to the amount of the purchase price paid to, or for the benefit of, the person within one year of the seller's death.

(b) Acceptance of a promissory note of the purchaser or a 3rd party is not considered payment, but payment on the note is payment on the purchase price; and for purposes of this section property is considered sold as of the date when a valid contract of sale is made. Sale by an agent of the person who executed the governing instrument or by a trustee under a revocable living trust created by the person is a sale by the person for purposes of this section.

(3) **PROCEEDS OF INSURANCE ON PROPERTY.** Subject to sub. (6), if insured property that is the subject of a specific gift is destroyed, damaged, lost, stolen or otherwise subject to any casualty compensable by insurance, the specific beneficiary has the right to the following amounts, if available under the governing instrument,

reduced by any amount expended or incurred to restore or repair the property:

(a) Any insurance proceeds paid with respect to the property after the decedent's death, together with the incidents of the specific gift.

(b) A general pecuniary transfer equivalent to any insurance proceeds paid to, or for the benefit of, the decedent within one year of the decedent's death.

(4) **CONDEMNATION AWARD.** (a) Subject to sub. (6), if property that is the subject of a specific gift is taken by condemnation prior to the death of the person who executed the governing instrument, the specific beneficiary has the right to the following amounts if available under the governing instrument:

1. Any amount of the condemnation award unpaid at the time of death.

2. A general pecuniary transfer equivalent to the amount of an award paid to, or for the benefit of, the person who executed the governing instrument within one year of that person's death.

(b) In the event of an appeal in a condemnation proceeding, the award is, for purposes of this section, limited to the amount established on the appeal. Acceptance of an agreed price or a jurisdictional offer is a sale under sub. (2).

(5) **PROPERTY UNDER GUARDIANSHIP, CONSERVATORSHIP, OR POWER OF ATTORNEY.** (a) In this subsection, "agent" means an agent under a durable power of attorney, as defined in s. 244.02 (3).

(b) Subject to pars. (c) and (d) and sub. (6), if property that is the subject of a specific gift is sold or mortgaged by a guardian, conservator, or agent of the person who executed the governing instrument, or if a condemnation award or insurance proceeds are paid to a guardian, conservator, or agent, the specific beneficiary has the right to a general pecuniary transfer equivalent to the proceeds of the sale, mortgage, condemnation award, or insurance proceeds, reduced by any amount expended or incurred to restore or repair the property or to reduce the indebtedness on the mortgage, if the funds are available under the governing instrument.

(c) Paragraph (b) does not apply with respect to a guardian or conservator if, subsequent to the sale, mortgage, award, or receipt of insurance proceeds, the person who executed the governing instrument is adjudicated competent and survives such adjudication for a period of one year; but in such event the rights of the specific beneficiary shall be determined as though the proceeds were paid to the owner under sub. (2), (3), or (4).

(d) Paragraph (b) does not apply with respect to an agent if the person who executed the governing instrument is competent at the time of the sale, mortgage, award, or receipt of insurance proceeds but in such event the rights of the specific beneficiary shall be determined as though the proceeds were paid to the owner under sub. (2), (3), or (4).

(6) **LIMITATIONS.** (ag) This section is inapplicable if the person who executed the governing instrument gives property during the person's lifetime to the specific beneficiary with the intent of satisfying the specific gift and the requirement under s. 854.09 (1) is satisfied.

(ar) If the person who executed the governing instrument had an intent contrary to any provision in this section, then that provision is inapplicable to the transfer. Extrinsic evidence may be used to construe the intent.

(b) If part of the property that is the subject of the specific gift is destroyed, damaged, sold or condemned, the specific gift of any remaining interest in the property is not affected by this section; but this section applies to the part affected by the destruction, damage, sale or condemnation.

(c) The amount that the specific beneficiary receives under subs. (2) to (5) is reduced by any expenses of the sale, by the expenses of collection of the proceeds of insurance, sale, or condemnation award and by any amount by which the income tax of the decedent or the decedent's estate is increased because of items



covered by this section. Expenses include legal fees paid or incurred.

**History:** 1997 a. 188; 2005 a. 216, 387; 2009 a. 319.

**854.09 Advancement; satisfaction.** (1) A gift that the decedent made during his or her lifetime, including an incomplete gift that became complete on the decedent's death, is treated as a full or partial satisfaction of a transfer at death to an heir under s. 852.01 (1) or a transferee under a governing instrument executed by the decedent only if at least one of the following applies:

(a) The governing instrument, if any, either expressly or as construed from extrinsic evidence, provides that the gift be taken into account.

(b) The decedent declared in a document, either expressly or as construed from extrinsic evidence, that the gift is in satisfaction of, or an advance against, what the transferee would receive at the decedent's death, whether or not the document was contemporaneous with the gift.

(c) The transferee acknowledged in writing before or after the decedent's death, either expressly or as construed from extrinsic evidence, that the gift is in satisfaction of, or an advance against, what the transferee would receive at the decedent's death.

(2) For partial satisfaction, property given during life is valued as of the time that the transferee came into possession or enjoyment of the property or at the death of the person who executed the governing instrument, whichever occurs first.

(3) If the transferee fails to survive the person who executed the governing instrument and his or her issue take a substitute transfer under intestacy or under a governing instrument, the issue receive the same transfer that the named transferee would have received had the transferee survived, unless the transferor declared otherwise in a document, either expressly or as construed from extrinsic evidence.

**History:** 1997 a. 188; 2005 a. 216.

**854.10 Choice of law.** The meaning and legal effect of a governing instrument are determined by the local law of the state selected by the transferor in the governing instrument, unless the application of that law is contrary to s. 861.02 or 861.31 or any other public policy of this state otherwise applicable to the disposition.

**History:** 1997 a. 188.

**854.11 Gift of securities.** (1) **DEFINITION.** In this section, "securities" includes all of the following:

(a) Any note, stock, treasury stock, bond, debenture, evidence of indebtedness, collateral trust certificate, transferable share or voting trust certificate.

(b) Any certificate of interest or participation in an oil, gas or mining title or lease or in payments out of production under such a title or lease.

(c) Any interest or instrument commonly known as a security.

(d) Any certificate of interest or participation in, any temporary or interim certificate, receipt or certificate of deposit for, or any warrant or right to subscribe to or purchase, any of the instruments or interests specified in pars. (a) to (c).

(2) **INCREASE IN SECURITIES; ACCESSIONS.** Except as provided in sub. (4), if a person executes a governing instrument that transfers securities and at the time of the execution or immediately after execution the described securities are in fact governed by the instrument, the transfer includes additional securities that are governed by the instrument at the person's death if all of the following apply:

(a) The additional securities were acquired after the governing instrument was executed.

(b) The additional securities were acquired as a result of ownership of the described securities.

(c) The additional securities are any of the following types:

1. Securities of the same organization acquired as a result of a plan of reinvestment.

2. Securities of the same organization acquired by action initiated by the organization or any successor, related or acquiring organization, excluding any acquired by exercise of purchase options.

3. Securities of another organization acquired as a result of a merger, consolidation, reorganization or other distribution by the organization or any successor, related or acquiring organization.

(3) **GIFT OF SECURITIES CONSTRUED AS SPECIFIC.** Except as provided in sub. (4), a transfer of a stated number of shares or amount of securities is construed to be a specific gift if the same or a greater number of shares or amount of the securities was governed by the instrument at the time of, or immediately after, execution of the instrument, even if the instrument does not describe the securities more specifically or qualify the description by a possessive pronoun such as "my".

(4) **CONTRARY INTENT.** If the person who executed the governing instrument had an intent contrary to any provision in this section, then that provision is inapplicable to the transfer. Extrinsic evidence may be used to construe the intent.

**History:** 1997 a. 188; 2005 a. 216.

**854.12 Debt to transferor.** (1) **HEIR UNDER INTESTACY.** (a) If an heir owes a debt to the decedent, the amount of the indebtedness shall be offset against the intestate share of the debtor heir.

(b) In contesting an offset under par. (a), the debtor heir shall have the benefit of any defense that would be available to the debtor heir in a direct proceeding by the personal representative for the recovery of the debt, except that the debtor heir may not defend on the basis that the debt was discharged in bankruptcy or on the basis that the relevant statute of limitations has expired. If the debtor fails to survive the decedent, the court may not include the debt in computing any intestate shares of the debtor's issue.

(2) **TRANSFEEE UNDER REVOCABLE GOVERNING INSTRUMENT.** (a) Subject to par. (c), if a transferee under a revocable governing instrument survives the transferor and is indebted to the transferor, the amount of the indebtedness shall be treated as an offset against the property to which the debtor transferee is entitled. If multiple revocable governing instruments transfer property to the debtor, the debt shall be equitably allocated against the various instruments.

(b) Subject to par. (c), in contesting an offset under par. (a), the debtor shall have the benefit of any defense that would be available to the transferee in a direct proceeding for the recovery of the debt, except that the transferee may not defend on the basis that the debt was discharged in bankruptcy, unless that discharge occurred before the execution of the governing instrument, or on the basis that the relevant statute of limitations has expired. If the transferee fails to survive the decedent, the debt may not be included in computing the entitlement of alternate beneficiaries.

(c) If the person who executed the governing instrument had an intent contrary to any provision in this subsection, then that provision is not applicable to the transfer. Extrinsic evidence may be used to construe the intent.

(3) **PROPERTY NOT DISTRIBUTED BECAUSE OF OFFSET.** The property not distributed to the debtor becomes part of the residue of the entity that holds the debt. If the debt is not held by an entity, then the property not distributed to the debtor becomes part of the residue of the decedent's probate estate.

**History:** 2005 a. 216.

**854.13 Disclaimer of transfers at death.** (1) **DEFINITIONS.** In this section:

(a) "Beneficiary under a governing instrument" includes any person who receives or might receive property under the terms or legal effect of a governing instrument.

(c) "Power of appointment" has the meaning given in s. 702.102 (15).

(2) **RIGHT TO DISCLAIM.** (a) *In general.* 1. In this paragraph, "person" includes a person who is unborn or whose identity is unascertained.

2. A person who is an heir, recipient of property, or beneficiary under a governing instrument, donee of a power of appointment created by a governing instrument, appointee under a power of appointment exercised by a governing instrument, taker in default under a power of appointment created by a governing instrument, or person succeeding to disclaimed property may disclaim any property, including contingent or future interests or the right to receive discretionary distributions, by delivering a written instrument of disclaimer under this section.

(b) *Joint tenants.* Upon the death of a joint tenant, a surviving joint tenant may disclaim any property that would otherwise accrue to him or her by right of survivorship and that is the subject of the joint tenancy by delivering a written instrument of disclaimer under this section.

(c) *Survivorship marital property.* Upon the death of a spouse, the surviving spouse may disclaim the decedent spouse's interest in survivorship marital property.

(d) *Partial disclaimer.* Property may be disclaimed in whole or in part, except that a partial disclaimer of property passing by a governing instrument or by the exercise of a power of appointment may not be made if partial disclaimer is expressly prohibited by the governing instrument or by the instrument exercising the power of appointment.

(e) *Spendthrift provision.* The right to disclaim exists notwithstanding any limitation on the interest of the disclaimant in the nature of a spendthrift provision or similar restriction.

(f) *Disclaimer by guardian or conservator.* A guardian of the estate or a conservator appointed under ch. 54 or ch. 880, 2003 stats., may disclaim on behalf of his or her ward, with court approval, if the ward is entitled to disclaim under this section.

(g) *Disclaimer by agent under power of attorney.* An agent under a power of attorney may disclaim on behalf of the person who granted the power of attorney if all of the following apply:

1. The person who granted the power of attorney is entitled to disclaim under this section.
2. The power of attorney specifically grants the power to disclaim.

(gm) *Disclaimer by trustee.* The trustee of a trust named as a recipient of property under a governing instrument may disclaim that property on behalf of the trust if the trust authorizes disclaimer by the trustee. If the trust does not authorize disclaimer by the trustee, the trustee's power to disclaim is subject to the approval of the court.

(h) *After death.* A person's right to disclaim survives the person's death and may be exercised by the person's personal representative or special administrator upon receiving approval from the court having jurisdiction of the person's estate after hearing upon notice to all persons interested in the disclaimed property, if the personal representative or special administrator has not taken any action that would bar the right to disclaim under sub. (11g).

(i) *Disclaimer of inter vivos transfers.* A person who is a recipient of property under an inter vivos governing instrument, as defined in s. 700.27 (1) (c), may disclaim the property as provided in s. 700.27.

**(3) INSTRUMENT OF DISCLAIMER.** The instrument of disclaimer shall do all of the following:

- (a) Describe the property disclaimed.
- (b) Declare the disclaimer and the extent of the disclaimer.
- (c) Be signed by the disclaimant.
- (d) Be delivered within the time and in the manner provided under subs. (4) and (5).

**(4) TIME FOR EFFECTIVE DISCLAIMER.** (a) *Present interest.* An instrument disclaiming a present interest shall be executed and delivered not later than 9 months after the effective date of the transfer under the governing instrument. For cause shown, the period may be extended by a court of competent jurisdiction, either within or after the 9-month period, for such additional time as the court considers just.

(b) *Future interest.* An instrument disclaiming a future interest shall be executed and delivered not later than 9 months after the event that determines that the taker of the property is finally ascertained and his or her interest indefeasibly fixed. For cause shown, the period may be extended by a court of competent jurisdiction, either within or after the 9-month period, for such additional time as the court considers just.

(c) *Future right to income or principal.* Notwithstanding pars. (a) and (b), an instrument disclaiming the future right to receive discretionary or mandatory distributions of income or principal from any source may be executed and delivered at any time.

(d) *Persons under 21.* Notwithstanding pars. (a) and (b), a person under 21 years of age may disclaim at any time not later than 9 months after the date on which the person attains 21 years of age.

(e) *Interests arising by disclaimer.* Notwithstanding pars. (a) and (b), a person whose interest in property arises by disclaimer or by default of exercise of a power of appointment created by a governing instrument may disclaim at any time not later than 9 months after the day on which the prior instrument of disclaimer is delivered, or the date of death of the donee of the power of appointment.

**(5) DELIVERY AND FILING OF DISCLAIMER.** (a) *Delivery.* In addition to any requirements imposed by the governing instrument, the instrument of disclaimer is effective only if, within the time specified under sub. (4), it is delivered to and received by any of the following:

1. The transferor of the property disclaimed, if living.
2. The personal representative or special administrator of the deceased transferor of the property.
3. The holder of legal title to the property.

(b) *Delivery to trustee.* If the trustee of any trust to which the interest or power of appointment relates does not receive the instrument of disclaimer under par. (a), a copy shall also be delivered to the trustee.

(c) *Filing.* When delivery is made to the personal representative or special administrator of a deceased transferor, a copy of the instrument of disclaimer shall be filed in the probate court having jurisdiction.

(d) *Failure to deliver or file.* Failure to deliver a copy of the instrument of disclaimer to the trustee under par. (b) or to file a copy in the probate court under par. (c), within the time specified under sub. (4), does not affect the validity of any disclaimer.

(e) *Recording.* If real property or an interest in real property is disclaimed, a copy of the instrument of disclaimer may be recorded in the office of the register of deeds of the county in which the real estate is situated.

**(6) PROPERTY NOT VESTED.** The property disclaimed under this section shall be considered not to have been vested in, created in or transferred to the disclaimant.

**(7) DEVOLUTION.** (a) *In general.* Subject to pars. (bm) and (c) and subs. (8), (9), and (10), unless the governing instrument provides otherwise, either expressly or as construed from extrinsic evidence, the disclaimed property devolves as if the disclaimant had died before the decedent. If the disclaimed interest is a remainder contingent on surviving to the time of distribution, the disclaimed interest passes as if the disclaimant had died immediately before the time for distribution. If the disclaimant is an appointee under a power of appointment exercised by a governing instrument, the disclaimed property devolves as if the disclaimant had died before the effective date of the exercise of the power of appointment. If the disclaimant is a taker in default under a power of appointment created by a governing instrument, the disclaimed property devolves as if the disclaimant had predeceased the donee of the power of appointment.

(bm) *Devolution to issue of the disclaimants.* Unless the governing instrument provides otherwise, either expressly or as construed from extrinsic evidence, if, by law or under the governing instrument, the issue of the disclaimant would share in the disclaimed interest by any method of representation had the dis-

claimant died before the time the disclaimed interest would have taken effect in possession or enjoyment, the disclaimed interest passes only to the issue of the disclaimant who survive when the disclaimed interest takes effect in possession or enjoyment.

(c) *Disclaimer of a devisable future interest.* 1. In this paragraph, “devisable future interest” is a future interest that can be passed under the will of the person who holds the future interest.

2. If the disclaimed interest is a devisable future interest under the law governing the transfer, then the disclaimed interest devolves as if it were a nondevisable future interest.

**(8) DEVOLUTION OF DISCLAIMED INTEREST IN JOINT TENANCY.** Unless the decedent provided otherwise in a governing instrument, either expressly or as construed from extrinsic evidence, a disclaimed interest in a joint tenancy passes to the decedent’s probate estate.

**(9) DEVOLUTION OF DISCLAIMED INTEREST IN SURVIVORSHIP MARITAL PROPERTY.** Unless the decedent provided otherwise in a governing instrument, either expressly or as construed from extrinsic evidence, a disclaimed interest in survivorship marital property passes to the decedent’s probate estate.

**(10) ACCELERATION OF SUBSEQUENT INTERESTS WHEN PRECEDING INTEREST IS DISCLAIMED.** (a) *Subsequent interest not held by disclaimant.* Unless the governing instrument provides otherwise, either expressly or as construed from extrinsic evidence, upon the disclaimer of a preceding interest, a subsequent interest not held by the disclaimant and limited to take effect in possession or enjoyment after the termination of the interest that is disclaimed accelerates to take effect as if the disclaimant had died immediately before the time when the disclaimed interest would have taken effect in possession or enjoyment or, if the disclaimant is an appointee under a power of appointment and that power of appointment has been exercised, as if the disclaimant had died before the effective date of the exercise of the power of appointment.

(b) *Subsequent interest held by the disclaimant.* Unless the governing instrument provides otherwise, either expressly or as construed from extrinsic evidence, upon the disclaimer of a preceding interest, a subsequent interest held by the disclaimant does not accelerate.

**(11g) BAR.** Bars to a person’s right to disclaim property include, but are not limited to, any of the following:

(a) The person’s assignment, conveyance, encumbrance, pledge, or transfer of the property or a contract for the assignment, conveyance, encumbrance, pledge, or transfer of the property.

(b) The person’s written waiver of the right to disclaim.

(c) The person’s acceptance of the property or benefit of the property.

**(11p) EFFECT OF DISCLAIMER OR WAIVER.** The disclaimer or the written waiver of the right to disclaim is binding upon the disclaimant or person waiving and all persons claiming through or under him or her.

**(12) NONEXCLUSIVENESS OF REMEDY.** (a) This section does not affect the right of a person to waive, release, disclaim or renounce property under any other statute, the common law, or as provided in the creating instrument.

(b) Any disclaimer that meets the requirements of section 2518 of the Internal Revenue Code, or the requirements of any other federal law relating to disclaimers, constitutes an effective disclaimer under this section or s. 700.27.

**(13) CONSTRUCTION OF EFFECTIVE DATE.** In this section, the effective date of a transfer under a revocable governing instrument is the date on which the person with the power to revoke the transfer no longer has that power or the power to transfer the legal or equitable ownership of the property that is the subject of the transfer.

**History:** 1977 c. 309; 1983 a. 189 s. 329 (26); 1991 a. 39, 301; 1995 a. 360; 1997 a. 188 ss. 22 to 59, 175; Stats. 1997 s. 854.13; 2005 a. 216, 387; 2013 a. 92; 2023 a. 127.

**NOTE:** 1991 Wis. Act 301, which affected this section, contains extensive legislative council notes.

Unless barred by statute, a debtor can disclaim a bequest, thus defeating a creditor’s action under s. 813.026. *Estate of Goldhammer v. Goldhammer*, 138 Wis. 2d 77, 405 N.W.2d 693 (Ct. App. 1987).

Except for a tax-related “qualified disclaimer,” the 9-month time limit for the disclaimer of a future interest commences on the death of the life tenant. *Estate of Balson*, 183 Wis. 2d 31, 515 N.W.2d 474 (Ct. App. 1994).

A surviving spouse cannot disclaim a wrongful death claim under s. 854.13 so as to pass ownership of that claim to the deceased’s lineal heirs. *Bowen v. American Family Insurance Company*, 2012 WI App 29, 340 Wis. 2d 232, 811 N.W.2d 887, 11–0185.

**NOTE:** The preceding cases were decided prior to the adoption of 1997 Wis. Act 188, which made extensive revisions to s. 853.40 and resulted in the creation of s. 854.06.

**854.14 Beneficiary who kills decedent. (2) REVOCATION OF BENEFITS.** Except as provided in sub. (6), the unlawful and intentional killing of the decedent does all of the following:

(a) Revokes a provision in a governing instrument that, by reason of the decedent’s death, does any of the following:

1. Transfers or appoints property to the killer.

2. Confers a power of appointment on the killer.

3. Nominates or appoints the killer to serve in any fiduciary or representative capacity, including personal representative, trustee, or agent.

(b) Severs the interests of the decedent and killer in property held by them as joint tenants with the right of survivorship or as survivorship marital property and transforms the interests of the decedent and the killer into tenancies in common or marital property, whichever is appropriate.

(c) Revokes every statutory right or benefit to which the killer may have been entitled by reason of the decedent’s death.

**(3) EFFECT OF REVOCATION.** Except as provided in sub. (6), provisions of a governing instrument that are revoked by this section are given effect as if the killer disclaimed all revoked provisions or, in the case of a revoked nomination in a fiduciary or representative capacity, as if the killer predeceased the decedent. Except as provided in sub. (6), the killer’s share of the decedent’s intestate estate, if any, passes as if the killer had disclaimed his or her intestate share under s. 854.13.

**(3m) ADDITIONAL EFFECTS IF DEATH CAUSED BY SPOUSE.** (a) *Definitions.* In this subsection:

1. “Owner” means a person appearing on the records of the policy issuer as the person having the ownership interest, or means the insured if no person other than the insured appears on those records as a person having that interest. In the case of group insurance, the “owner” means the holder of each individual certificate of coverage under the group plan and does not include the person who contracted with the policy issuer on behalf of the group, regardless of whether that person is listed as the owner on the contract.

2. “Ownership interest” means the rights of an owner under a policy.

3. “Policy” means an insurance policy insuring the life of a spouse and providing for payment of death benefits at the spouse’s death.

4. “Proceeds” means the death benefit from a policy and all other economic benefits from it, whether they accrue or become payable as a result of the death of an insured person or upon the occurrence or nonoccurrence of another event.

(b) *Life insurance.* 1. Except as provided in sub. (6), if a non-insured spouse unlawfully and intentionally kills an insured spouse, the surviving spouse’s ownership interest in a policy that designates the decedent spouse as the owner and insured, or in the proceeds of such a policy, is limited to a dollar amount equal to one-half of the marital property interest in the interpolated terminal reserve and in the unused portion of the term premium of the policy on the date of death of the decedent spouse. All other rights of the surviving spouse in the ownership interest or proceeds of the policy, other than the marital property interest described in this subsection, terminate at the decedent spouse’s death.

2. Notwithstanding s. 766.61 (7) and except as provided in sub. (6), if an insured spouse unlawfully and intentionally kills a



noninsured spouse, the ownership interest at death of the decedent spouse in any policy with a marital property component that designates the surviving spouse as the owner and insured is a fractional interest equal to one-half of the portion of the policy that was marital property immediately before the death of the decedent spouse.

(c) *Deferred employment benefits.* Notwithstanding s. 766.62 (5) and except as provided in sub. (6), if the employee spouse unlawfully and intentionally kills the nonemployee spouse, the ownership interest at death of the decedent spouse in any deferred employment benefit, or in assets in an individual retirement account that are traceable to the rollover of a deferred employment benefit plan, that has a marital property component and that is attributable to the employment of the surviving spouse is equal to one-half of the portion of the benefit or assets that was marital property immediately before the death of the decedent spouse.

(d) *Deferred marital property.* Except as provided in sub. (6), if the surviving spouse unlawfully and intentionally kills the decedent spouse, the estate of the decedent shall have the right to elect no more than 50 percent of the augmented deferred marital property estate, as determined under s. 861.02 (2), as though the decedent spouse were the survivor and the surviving spouse were the decedent. The court shall construe the provisions of ss. 861.03 to 861.11 as necessary to achieve the intent of this paragraph.

(4) **WRONGFUL ACQUISITION OF PROPERTY.** Except as provided in sub. (6), a wrongful acquisition of property by a killer not covered by this section shall be treated in accordance with the principle that a killer cannot profit from his or her wrongdoing.

(5) **UNLAWFUL AND INTENTIONAL KILLING; HOW DETERMINED.** (a) A final judgment establishing criminal accountability for the unlawful and intentional killing of the decedent conclusively establishes the convicted individual as the decedent's killer for purposes of this section.

(b) A final adjudication of delinquency on the basis of an unlawful and intentional killing of the decedent conclusively establishes the adjudicated individual as the decedent's killer for purposes of this section.

(c) In the absence of a judgment establishing criminal accountability under par. (a) or an adjudication of delinquency under par. (b), the court, upon the petition of an interested person, shall determine whether, based on the preponderance of the evidence, the killing of the decedent was unlawful and intentional for purposes of this section.

(6) **EXCEPTIONS.** This section does not apply if any of the following applies:

(a) The court finds that, under the factual situation created by the killing, the decedent's wishes would best be carried out by means of another disposition of the property.

(b) The decedent provided in his or her will, by specific reference to this section, that this section does not apply.

**History:** 1997 a. 188; 2001 a. 102; 2005 a. 216.

"Unlawful and intentional killing" in this section does not include assisting another to commit suicide. Lemmer v. Schunk, 2008 WI App 157, 314 Wis. 2d 483, 760 N.W.2d 446, 07–2680.

Statute in the Abyss: The Implications of Insanity on Wisconsin's Slayer Statute. Eisold. 91 MLR 875 (2008).

**854.15 Revocation of provisions in favor of former spouse or former domestic partner.** (1) **DEFINITIONS.** In this section:

(a) "Disposition of property" means a transfer, including by appointment, of property or any other benefit to a beneficiary designated in a governing instrument.

(b) "Divorce, annulment or similar event" means any of the following:

1. A divorce, annulment, or other event or proceeding that would exclude a spouse as a surviving spouse under s. 851.30.

2. A termination of a domestic partnership or other event or proceeding that would exclude a person as a surviving domestic partner under s. 851.295.

(c) "Former spouse" means a person whose marriage to the decedent or domestic partnership with the decedent has been the subject of a divorce, annulment or similar event.

(d) "Relative of the former spouse" means an individual who is related to the former spouse by blood, adoption or marriage and who, after the divorce, annulment or similar event, is not related to the decedent by blood, adoption or marriage.

(2) **SCOPE.** This section applies only to governing instruments that were executed by the decedent before the occurrence of a divorce, annulment or similar event with respect to his or her marriage to the former spouse.

(3) **REVOCATION UPON DIVORCE.** Except as provided in subs. (5) and (6), a divorce, annulment or similar event does all of the following:

(a) Revokes any revocable disposition of property made by the decedent to the former spouse or a relative of the former spouse in a governing instrument.

(b) Revokes any disposition created by law to the former spouse or a relative of the former spouse.

(c) Revokes any revocable provision made by the decedent in a governing instrument conferring a power of appointment on the former spouse or a relative of the former spouse.

(d) Revokes the decedent's revocable nomination of the former spouse or a relative of the former spouse to serve in any fiduciary or representative capacity.

(e) Severs the interests of the decedent and former spouse in property held by them as joint tenants with the right of survivorship or as survivorship marital property and transforms the interests of the decedent and former spouse into tenancies in common.

(4) **EFFECT OF REVOCATION.** Except as provided in subs. (5) and (6), provisions of a governing instrument that are revoked by this section are given effect as if the former spouse and relatives of the former spouse disclaimed the revoked provisions or, in the case of a revoked nomination in a fiduciary or representative capacity, as if the former spouse and relatives of the former spouse died immediately before the divorce, annulment or similar event.

(5) **EXCEPTIONS.** (am) This section does not apply if any of the following applies:

1. The express terms of a governing instrument provide otherwise.

2. The express terms of a court order provide otherwise.

3. The express terms of a contract relating to the division of the decedent's and former spouse's property made between the decedent and the former spouse before or after the marriage or the divorce, annulment or similar event provide otherwise.

4. The divorce, annulment or similar event is nullified.

5. The decedent and the former spouse have remarried or entered into a new domestic partnership before the death of the decedent.

(bm) If the transfer is made under a governing instrument and the person who executed the governing instrument had an intent contrary to any provision in this section, then that provision is inapplicable to the transfer. Extrinsic evidence may be used to construe the intent.

(6) **REVOCATION OF NONTESTAMENTARY PROVISION IN MARITAL PROPERTY AGREEMENT.** The effect of a judgment of annulment, divorce or legal separation on marital property agreements under s. 766.58 is governed by s. 767.375 (1).

**History:** 1997 a. 188; 2005 a. 216; 2005 a. 443 s. 265; 2009 a. 28.

Retroactive application of sub. (3) (a) is constitutional. Allstate Life Insurance Co. v. Hanson, 200 F. Supp. 2d 1012 (2002).

New Probate Code Affects Estate Planning at Divorce. Hughes. Wis. Law. March 1999.

**854.17 Marital property classification; ownership and division of marital property at death.** Classification of the property of a decedent spouse and surviving spouse, and ownership and division of that property at the death of a spouse, are determined under ch. 766 and s. 861.01.

**History:** 1985 a. 37; 1997 a. 188 s. 92; Stats. 1997 s. 854.17; 2005 a. 216, 387; 2009 a. 180.

**854.18 Order in which assets apportioned; abatement.**

(1) (a) Except as provided in sub. (3) or in connection with the deferred marital property elective share amount of a surviving spouse who elects under s. 861.02, the share of a surviving spouse who takes under s. 853.12, or the share of a surviving child who takes under s. 853.25, shares of distributees abate, without any preference or priority as between real and personal property, in the following order:

1. If the governing instrument is a will, property subject to intestacy.
2. Residuary transfers or devises under the governing instrument.
3. General transfers or devises under the governing instrument.
4. Specific transfers or devises under the governing instrument.

(b) For purposes of abatement, a general transfer or devise charged on any specific property or fund is a specific transfer to the extent of the value of the property on which it is charged, and upon the failure or insufficiency of the property on which it is charged, it is a general transfer to the extent of the failure or insufficiency.

(2) (a) Abatement within each classification is in proportion to the amount of property that each of the beneficiaries would have received if full distribution of the property had been made in accordance with the terms of the governing instrument.

(b) If the subject of a preferred transfer is sold or used incident to administration of an estate, abatement shall be achieved by appropriate adjustments in, or contribution from, other interests in the remaining assets.

(3) If the governing instrument expresses an order of abatement, or if the transferor's estate plan or the purpose of the transfer, as expressed, implied, or construed through extrinsic evidence, would be defeated by the order of abatement under sub. (1), the shares of the distributees abate as necessary to give effect to the intention of the transferor.

**History:** 1997 a. 188; 2005 a. 216.

**854.19 Penalty clause for contest.** A provision in a governing instrument that prescribes a penalty against an interested person for contesting the governing instrument or instituting other proceedings relating to the governing instrument may not be enforced if the court determines that the interested person had probable cause for instituting the proceedings.

**History:** 1997 a. 188.

**854.20 Status of adopted persons.** (1) INHERITANCE RIGHTS BETWEEN ADOPTIVE PERSON AND ADOPTIVE RELATIVES. (a) Subject to par. (b) and sub. (5), a legally adopted person is treated as a birth child of the person's adoptive parents and the adoptive parents are treated as the birth parents of the adopted person for purposes of transfers at death to, through, and from the adopted person and for purposes of any statute or other rule conferring rights upon children, issue, or relatives in connection with the law of intestate succession or governing instruments.

(b) Subject to sub. (5), par. (a) applies only if at least one of the following applies:

1. The decedent or transferor is the adoptive parent or adopted child.
2. The adopted person was a minor at the time of adoption.

3. The adoptive parent raised the adopted person in a parent-like relationship beginning on or before the child's 15th birthday and lasting for a substantial period or until adulthood.

(2) INHERITANCE RIGHTS BETWEEN ADOPTED PERSON AND BIRTH RELATIVES. (am) Subject to sub. (5), a legally adopted person ceases to be treated as a child of the person's birth parents and the birth parents cease to be treated as the parents of the child for the purposes specified in sub. (1) (a), except:

1. If the parent-child relationship between the child and one birth parent is replaced by adoption, but the relationship to the other birth parent is not replaced, then for all purposes the child continues to be treated as the child of the birth parent whose relationship was not replaced.

2. a. Subject to subd. 2. b. and c., if a birth parent of a child born to married parents dies and the other birth parent subsequently remarries and the child is adopted by the stepparent, the child continues to be treated as the child of the deceased birth parent for purposes of transfers at death through that parent and for purposes of any statute or other rule conferring rights upon children, issue or relatives of that parent under the law of intestate succession or governing instruments.

b. Subd. 2. a. applies only if the adopted person was a minor at the time of adoption or if the adoptive parent raised the adopted person in a parent-like relationship beginning on or before the child's 15th birthday and lasting for a substantial period or until adulthood.

c. Subdivision 2. a. does not apply if the parental rights of the deceased birth parent had been terminated.

(bm) Subject to sub. (5), if an adopted child is subsequently adopted by another person, the former adoptive parent is considered to be a birth parent for purposes of this subsection.

(5) CONTRARY INTENT. If the transfer is made under a governing instrument and the person who executed the governing instrument had an intent contrary to any provision in this section, then that provision is not applicable to the transfer. Extrinsic evidence may be used to construe the intent.

**History:** 1983 a. 447; 1993 a. 486; 1997 a. 188 ss. 96, 175; Stats. 1997 s. 854.20; 2005 a. 216.

**854.21 Persons included in family groups or classes.**

(1) ADOPTED PERSONS. (a) Except as provided in sub. (7), a gift of property by a governing instrument to a class of persons described as "issue," "lawful issue," "children," "grandchildren," "descendants," "heirs," "heirs of the body," "next of kin," "distributees," or the like includes a person adopted by a person whose birth child would be a member of the class, and issue of the adopted person, if the conditions for membership in the class are otherwise satisfied and at least one of the criteria under s. 854.20 (1) (b) 1., 2., and 3. is satisfied.

(b) Except as provided in sub. (7), a gift of property by a governing instrument to a class of persons described as "issue," "lawful issue," "children," "grandchildren," "descendants," "heirs," "heirs of the body," "next of kin," "distributees," or the like excludes a birth child and his or her issue otherwise within the class if the birth child has been adopted and would cease to be treated as a child of the birth parent under s. 854.20 (2).

(2) INDIVIDUALS BORN TO UNMARRIED PARENTS. (a) Subject to par. (b) and sub. (7), individuals born to unmarried parents are included in class gifts and other terms of relationship in accordance with s. 852.05.

(b) In addition to the requirements of par. (a) and subject to the provisions of sub. (7), in construing a disposition by a transferor who is not the birth parent, an individual born to unmarried parents is not considered to be the child of a birth parent unless that individual lived while a minor as a regular member of the household of that birth parent or of that birth parent's parent, brother, sister, spouse or surviving spouse.



(3) **RELATIVES BY MARRIAGE.** Subject to sub. (7), terms of family relationship in statutes or governing instruments that do not differentiate between relationships by blood and relationships by marriage are construed to exclude relatives by marriage.

(4) **RELATIVES OF THE HALF–BLOOD.** Subject to sub. (7), terms of family relationship in statutes or governing instruments that do not differentiate between relationships by the half–blood and relationships by the full–blood are construed to include both types of relationships.

(5) **POSTHUMOUS ISSUE.** Subject to sub. (7), if a statute or governing instrument transfers an interest to a group of persons described as a class, such as “issue”, “children”, “nephews and nieces” or any other class, a person conceived at the time the membership in the class is determined and subsequently born alive is entitled to take as a member of the class if that person otherwise satisfies the conditions for class membership and survives at least 120 hours past birth.

(6) **PERSON RELATED THROUGH 2 LINES.** Subject to sub. (7), a person who is eligible to be a transferee under a statute or governing instrument through 2 lines of relationship is limited to one share, based on the relationship that entitles the person to the larger share.

(7) **CONTRARY INTENT.** If the transfer is made under a governing instrument and the person who executed the governing instrument had an intent contrary to any provision in this section, then that provision is inapplicable to the transfer. Extrinsic evidence may be used to construe the intent.

**History:** 1997 a. 188; 2005 a. 216.

### 854.22 Form of distribution for transfers to family groups or classes.

(1) **INTERESTS IN HEIRS, NEXT OF KIN AND THE LIKE.** Subject to sub. (4), if a statute or governing instrument specifies that a present or future interest is to be created in a designated individual’s “heirs”, “heirs at law”, “next of kin”, “relatives”, “family” or a term that has a similar meaning, the property passes to the persons, including the state, to whom it would pass and in the shares in which it would pass under the laws of intestacy of the designated individual’s domicile, as if the designated individual had died immediately before the transfer was to take effect in possession or enjoyment. If the designated individual’s surviving spouse is living and remarried when the transfer is to take effect in possession or enjoyment, the surviving spouse is not an heir of the designated individual.

(2) **TRANSFERS TO DESCENDANTS, ISSUE AND THE LIKE.** Subject to sub. (4), if a statute or governing instrument creates a class gift in favor of a designated individual’s “descendants”, “issue” or “heirs of the body” the property is distributed among the class members who are living when the interest is to take effect in possession or enjoyment in the shares that they would receive under the laws of intestacy of the designated individual’s domicile, as if the designated individual had then died owning the subject matter of the class gift.

(3) **DOCTRINE OF WORTHIER TITLE ABOLISHED.** The doctrine of worthier title is abolished as a rule of law and as a rule of construction. Language in a governing instrument describing the beneficiaries of a disposition as the transferor’s “heirs”, “heirs at law”, “next of kin”, “distributees”, “relatives” or “family”, or a term that has a similar meaning, does not create or presumptively create a reversionary interest in the transferor.

(4) **CONTRARY INTENT.** If the transfer is made under a governing instrument and the person who executed the governing instrument had an intent contrary to any provision in this section, then that provision is inapplicable to the transfer. Extrinsic evidence may be used to construe the intent.

**History:** 1997 a. 188; 2005 a. 216.

### 854.23 Protection of payers and other 3rd parties.

(1) **DEFINITION.** In this section, “governing instrument” includes an instrument described in s. 854.01, a filed verified statement

under s. 865.201, a certificate under s. 867.046 (1m), a confirmation under s. 867.046 (2), or a recorded application under s. 867.046 (5).

(2) **LIABILITY DEPENDS ON NOTICE.** (a) A payer or other 3rd party is not liable for having transferred property to a beneficiary designated in a governing instrument who, under this chapter, is not entitled to the property, or for having taken any other action in good faith reliance on the beneficiary’s apparent entitlement under the terms of the governing instrument, before the payer or other 3rd party received written notice of a claimed lack of entitlement under this chapter. However, a payer or other 3rd party is liable for a payment made or other action taken after the payer or other 3rd party received written notice of a claimed lack of entitlement under this chapter.

(b) Severance of a joint interest under the provisions of this chapter does not affect any 3rd–party interest in property acquired for value and in good faith reliance on an apparent title by survivorship, unless a document declaring the severance has been noted, registered, filed or recorded in records appropriate to the kind and location of the property that are relied upon, in the ordinary course of transactions involving such property, as evidence of ownership.

(3) **MANNER OF NOTICE.** A claimant shall mail written notice of a claimed lack of entitlement under sub. (2) to the 3rd party’s main office or home by registered or certified mail, return receipt requested, or serve the claim upon the 3rd party in the same manner as a summons in a civil action.

(4) **DEPOSIT OF PROPERTY WITH COURT.** (a) Upon receipt of written notice of a claimed lack of entitlement under this chapter, a 3rd party may transfer property held by it to the court having jurisdiction of the probate proceedings relating to the decedent’s estate. If no proceedings have been commenced, the transfer may be made to the court having jurisdiction of probate proceedings relating to decedents’ estates located in the county of the decedent’s residence. The court shall hold the property and, upon its determination of the owner, shall order disbursement in accordance with the determination.

(b) Property transferred to the court discharges the 3rd party from all claims for the property.

(5) **PROTECTION OF FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS.** (a) In this subsection:

1. “Account” has the meaning given in s. 705.01 (1) or 710.05 (1) (a).
2. “Financial institution” has the meaning given in s. 705.01 (3).

(b) Notwithstanding sub. (2), in addition to the protections afforded a financial institution under ss. 701.1012 and 710.05 and chs. 112 and 705 a financial institution is not liable for having transferred an account to a beneficiary designated in a governing instrument who, under this chapter, is not entitled to the account, or for having taken any other action in reliance on the beneficiary’s apparent entitlement under the terms of a governing instrument, regardless of whether the financial institution received written notice of a claimed lack of entitlement under this chapter.

(c) If a financial institution has reason to believe that a dispute exists as to the rights of parties, or their successors, to an account subject to a governing instrument, the financial institution may, but is not required to, do any of the following:

1. Deposit the account with a court as provided in sub. (4).
2. Refuse to transfer the account to any person.

(d) The protection afforded a financial institution under this subsection does not affect the rights of parties or their successors in disputes concerning the beneficial ownership of accounts.

**History:** 1997 a. 188; 2005 a. 216; 2013 a. 92.

While s. 854.01 defines “governing instrument” generally in ch. 854 quite broadly and clearly intends a marital property agreement be considered a governing instrument, s. 854.23, the section concerning protection of payers and other third–parties, defines “governing instrument” for purposes of that section, as one of 3 specific alternatives and is limited to those alternatives. A payer need not require compliance with this section before it can legally transfer funds to a beneficiary. However, to be

afforded the protections under this section, compliance with its requirements is mandatory. *Maciolek v. City of Milwaukee Employees' Retirement System Annuity and Pension Board*, 2006 WI 10, 288 Wis. 2d 62, 709 N.W.2d 360, 04–1254.

**854.24 Protection of buyers.** A person who purchases property for value or who receives property in partial or full satisfaction of a legally enforceable obligation is neither obligated under this chapter to return the property nor liable under this chapter for the value of the property, unless the person has notice as described in s. 854.23 (3).

**History:** 1997 a. 188.

**854.25 Personal liability of recipients not for value.**

**(1) ORIGINAL RECIPIENTS.** A person who, not for value, receives property to which the person is not entitled under this chapter shall return the property. If the property is not returned, the recipient shall be personally liable for the value of the property to the person who is entitled to it under this chapter, regardless of whether the recipient has the property, its proceeds or property acquired with the property or its proceeds.

**(2) SUBSEQUENT RECIPIENTS.** (a) If a recipient described in sub. (1) gives all or part of the property described in sub. (1) to a subsequent recipient, not for value, the subsequent recipient shall return the property. If the property is not returned, the subsequent recipient shall be personally liable to the person who is entitled to it under this chapter for the value received, if the subsequent recipient has the property, its proceeds or property acquired with the property or its proceeds.

(b) If the subsequent recipient described in par. (a) does not have the transfer described, its proceeds or the property acquired with the property or its proceeds, but knew or should have known of his or her liability under this section, the subsequent recipient remains personally liable to the person who is entitled to it under this chapter for the value received.

**(3) MODE OF SATISFACTION.** On petition of the person entitled to the property under this chapter showing that the mode of satisfaction chosen by the recipient in sub. (1) or (2) will create a hardship for the entitled person, the court may order that a different mode of satisfaction be used.

**History:** 1997 a. 188.

**854.26 Effect of federal preemption.** If any provision in this chapter is preempted by federal law with respect to property covered by this chapter, a person who receives property, other than for full consideration, which the person is not entitled to receive under this chapter is subject to s. 854.25.

**History:** 1997 a. 188.

**854.30 Application of certain wills or trusts referring to repealed federal transfer taxes.** (1) A will or trust of a decedent who dies after December 31, 2009, and before January 1, 2011, that contains a formula disposing of certain of the decedent's property that is determined by reference to exemptions,

exclusions, deductions, or credits under the federal estate tax, 26 USC 2001–2801, the federal generation–skipping transfer tax, 26 USC 2601–2664, or both, shall be administered as follows:

(a) The formula disposing a decedent's property shall be administered as if the provisions of the federal estate tax and federal generation–skipping transfer tax were in force just as they were on December 31, 2009, except that the applicable exclusion amount under 26 USC 2010 (c) for decedents' estates shall be considered unlimited and the federal generation–skipping transfer tax exemption under 26 USC 2631 (c) shall also be considered unlimited, if all of the following apply:

1. The decedent is survived by a spouse.
2. If the decedent is survived by issue, all issue of the decedent are also issue of the surviving spouse.
3. The surviving spouse is a current income beneficiary of each trust funded in whole or in part by such formula, or the sole beneficiary of any other property subject to disposition by such formula which does not pass in trust.

(b) If any of the circumstances described in par. (a) 1., 2., and 3. is not present, the formula for disposing a decedent's property shall be administered as if the provisions of the federal estate tax and federal generation–skipping transfer tax were in force just as they were on December 31, 2009.

**(2)** A personal representative of a decedent's estate, a trustee of a decedent's trust, a surviving spouse of a decedent or any beneficiary of a will or trust to whom this section applies may petition the circuit court to apply a formula disposing of property under a will or trust by reference to the federal estate tax, the federal generation–skipping transfer tax, or both, or the exemptions, exclusions, deductions or credits under those taxes, in a manner different than that provided under sub. (1). The court may consider the overall dispositive plan of the decedent, the tax implications of alternative dispositions, the decedent's intentions in establishing the formula and such other matters as the court considers appropriate when determining how to respond to the petition. A proceeding under this subsection shall be commenced within one year of the decedent's death or be barred.

**(3)** This section does not apply to wills or trusts that are executed or amended after December 31, 2009, or that manifest an intent that a contrary rule apply if the decedent dies on a date on which there is no applicable federal estate tax or federal generation–skipping transfer tax.

**(4)** In the event that the federal estate tax, the federal generation–skipping transfer tax, or both, are applicable to transfers of assets of a decedent who dies after December 31, 2009, but before January 1, 2011, due to the establishment or reinstatement of one or both of those taxes, the provisions of this section do not apply to the decedent's will or trust and the formula shall be applied in a manner consistent with the applicable tax or taxes.

**History:** 2009 a. 341.