

The Case Against LegalZoom.com, Inc.

Any estate planning lawyer (or most any lawyer, in fact) will tell you that producing a comprehensive estate plan to meet the unique needs of the client is not as simple as pressing a button. It takes years of legal education and experience to identify and address potential issues.

LegalZoom.com, Inc. ("LegalZoom"), one of the leading providers of interactive legal forms for the public, offers no warranties whatsoever on the forms that you purchase from them - that they will meet your requirements, meet your expectations, or that the forms themselves are even correct. (See, <http://www.legalzoom.com/terms-of-use.html>, sec. 9, as accessed 3/16/2010)

Now, LegalZoom is being sued in a Missouri court for the unauthorized practice of law. The complaint includes reference to a finding by a committee of the North Carolina bar that LegalZoom was practicing law without a license. (See, http://www.ipwatchdog.com/cases/janson_v_legalzoom_complaint.html, as accessed 3/16/2010)

It is of note that LegalZoom's website now includes a disclaimer which reads as follows:

“Disclaimer: The information provided in this site is not legal advice, but general information on legal issues commonly encountered. LegalZoom's Legal Document Service is not a law firm and is not a substitute for an attorney or law firm. LegalZoom cannot provide legal advice and can only provide self-help services at your specific direction. Please note that your access to and use of LegalZoom.com is subject to additional terms and conditions. LegalZoom.com, Inc. is a registered and bonded legal document assistant, #0104, Los Angeles County (exp. 12/11).”
(<http://www.legalzoom.com>, as accessed 3/16/2010)

And, by admission, LegalZoom.com states:

“The law is a personal matter, and no general information or legal tool like the kind LegalZoom provides can fit every circumstance. Furthermore, the legal information contained on the Site is not legal advice and is not guaranteed to be correct, complete or up-to-date. Therefore, if you need legal advice for your specific problem, or if your specific problem is too complex to be addressed by our tools, you should consult a licensed attorney in your area.” (<http://www.legalzoom.com/terms-of-use.html>, as accessed 3/16/2010)

You should know that estate planning documents are merely tools to achieve the desired outcomes. The key is in knowing which tool is appropriate for the job and how to use that tool effectively.