

Taxation of Special Needs Trust

BY

Dennis Sandoval,
CELA

This article first appeared in the NAELA News, published by the National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys.



Special needs require special attorneys.

I. Overview

A. Characterization and Taxation of Income.

The characterization of income for trusts is the same as the characterization of income for individual taxpayers. Thus, income from interest, rents, and royalties is taxed as ordinary income. Although trusts are taxed on this income in the same manner as individuals, trusts have an accelerated rate schedule, which means that a trust reaches its maximum marginal tax rate at a much lower net income than does an individual. For 2016, a trust reaches its maximum marginal tax rate of 39.6% at only \$12,400 of taxable income, while a single individual taxpayer would have to earn over \$415,050 to be taxed at the same marginal tax rate. The tax rate schedules for individuals and trusts for 2008 are as follows:

2016 Tax Rate Schedule for Individuals

If Taxable Income Is:	The Tax Is:
Not over \$9,275.....	10% of the taxable income
Over \$9,275 but not over \$37,650.....	\$927.50 plus 15% of the excess over \$9,275
Over \$37,650 but not over \$91,150.....	\$5,183.75 plus 25% of the excess over \$37,650
Over \$91,150 but not over \$190,150.....	\$18,558.75 plus 28% of the excess over \$91,150
Over \$190,150 but not over \$413,350.....	\$46,278.75 plus 33% of the excess over \$190,150
Over \$413,350 but not over \$415,050.....	\$119,934.75 plus 35% of the excess over \$413,350
Over \$415,050.....	\$120,529.75 plus 39.6% of the excess over \$415,050

2016 Tax Rate Schedule for Trusts

If Taxable Income Is:	The Tax Is:
Not over \$2,550	15% of the taxable income
Over \$2,550 but not over \$5,950	\$382.50 plus 25% of the excess over \$2,550
Over \$5,950 but not over \$9,050	\$1,232.50 plus 28% of the excess over \$5,950
Over \$9,050 but not over \$12,400	\$2,100.50 plus 33% of the excess over \$9,050
Over \$12,400	\$3,206 plus 39.6% of the excess over \$12,400

Under current law, income in the form of qualified dividends paid to individual taxpayers is taxed at capital gain rates. As with individual taxpayers, trusts pay capital gain rates on qualified dividends. A qualified dividend is a dividend from an American company or qualifying foreign company that is not listed by the IRS as a dividend that does not qualify and for which the required holding period is met.

When an individual or trust sells or exchanges a capital asset, the sale is taxed at capital gain rates. For individual taxpayers as well as trusts, the maximum long term capital gain rate is 20%. In order to qualify for long term capital gain treatment, the asset must have been held for more than twelve months. Internal Revenue Code § 1223.

For 2016, an individual taxpayer was entitled to a standard deduction of \$6,300. An individual taxpayer that is not claimed as a dependent on another person's tax return is also entitled to a personal exemption of \$4,050 for 2016. An individual taxpayer with income of less than \$10,350 (\$6,300 plus \$4,050) would generally owe no income tax and not be required to file an income tax return. This is not true if the individual taxpayer is being claimed as a

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dependant on another taxpayer's tax return.

Furthermore, if the taxpayer is under eighteen years of age, any unearned income received by the minor is subject to the "kiddie tax". Under the Tax Increase Prevention and Reconciliation Act of 2005, the kiddie tax is applicable to all unearned income over \$2,100.00. The tax on unearned income of the child over \$2,100.00 is taxed at the parent's marginal tax rate (as high as 39.6%). Any earned income earned by the child would be entirely taxed at the child's marginal tax rate.

A trust is not entitled to a standard deduction. The exemption amount for a simple trust is \$300. The exemption amount for a complex trust is \$100. A trust with over \$600 of income is required to file a fiduciary income tax return.

However, if the trust is categorized as a Qualified Disability Trust, the trust is entitled to an exemption equal to the personal exemption for an individual (\$4,050 in 2016). To be characterized as a qualified disability trust, the trust must be an irrevocable trust established for the sole benefit of a person under the age of 65 who is also disabled, as defined by the SSI and Social Security Disability Income programs.

B. Difference Between Income for Tax Purposes and Income for Purposes of Determining Eligibility for Government Assistance

Internal Revenue Code § 61(a), defines "gross income" as:

all income from whatever source derived, including (but not limited to) the following items:
(1) compensation for

services, including fees, commissions, fringe benefits, and similar items; (2) gross income derived from business; (3) gains derived from dealings in property; (4) interest; (5) rents; (6) royalties; (7) dividends; (8) alimony and separate maintenance agreements; (9) annuities; (10) income from life insurance and endowment contracts; (11) pensions; (12) income from discharge of indebtedness; (13) distributive share of partnership gross income; (14) distributive share of partnership gross income; (14) income in respect of a decedent; and (15) income from an interest in an estate or trust.

This contrasts with the definition of income for purposes of SSI purposes. 42 U.S.C. § 1382(a) provides:

(a) For purposes of this subchapter, income means both earned income and unearned income; and—
(1) earned income means only—(A) wages...; (B) net earnings from self-employment...; (C) remuneration received for services performed in a sheltered workshop or work activities center; and (D) any royalty earned by an individual in connection with any publication of the work of the individual, and that portion of any honorarium which is received for services rendered; and
(2) unearned income means all other income, including—
(A) support and maintenance furnished in cash or kind...; (B) any payments received

as an annuity, pension, retirement, or disability benefit, including veterans' compensation and pensions, workmen's compensation payments, old-age, survivors, and disability insurance benefits, railroad retirement annuities and pensions, and unemployment insurance benefits; (C) prizes and awards; (D) payments to the individual occasioned by the death of another person, to the extent that the total of such payments exceeds the amount expended by such individual for purposes of the deceased person's last illness and burial; (E) support and alimony payments...; (F) rents, dividends, interest, and royalties...; and (G) any earnings of, and additions to, the corpus of a trust established by an individual..., of which the individual is a beneficiary, to which section 1382b(e) of this title applies, and, in the case of an irrevocable trust, with respect to which circumstances exist under which a payment from the earnings or additions could be made to or for the benefit of the individual.

Practitioners must be fully aware of the disconnect between the definition of income for income tax purposes and the definition of income as provided under Social Security Act. Certain items that are reported as income on the tax return of the disabled individual are not characterized as income for SSI qualification purposes, and vice versa. For instance, payment by the trustee of a SNT of rent payments for a disabled beneficiary from the principal of a SNT would not be considered income for income tax purposes, but would be considered

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income for purposes of determining initial and continuing SSI eligibility. If, instead of the using the principal distribution to pay rent for the disabled beneficiary, the trustee of the SNT used such distribution to pay for education costs for the disabled beneficiary, the distribution would not be considered income for either income tax purposes or purposes of initial or continuing SSI eligibility.

The distinction between income for purposes of SSI eligibility and income for income tax purposes is often not appreciated by Social Security Administration caseworkers. The caseworker will often incorrectly send out notices of reduction or termination of SSI benefits because of the worker's belief that income for SSI eligibility purposes was not previously reported. . In these instances, the practitioner must be fully prepared to advocate for the disabled beneficiary by explaining to the caseworker and his or her supervisor why income for income tax purposes is not income for public benefits purposes.

II. Taxation of Trusts

A. Grantor Trusts vs. Non-Grantor Trusts

A Non-Grantor Trust is a separate taxpayer from its creator. In the first half of the twentieth century, marginal tax rates for trusts were much lower than the marginal tax rates for individuals, which were between 70% and 95% following World War I, World War II, and the Korean War. Creative tax planners would use various trust schemes during this era in order to bring down the overall taxes of a family. In reaction to these creative schemes, Congress and the Internal Revenue Service brought about the grantor trust rules. A violation of these rules by the grantor or other designated individuals caused the trust to be disregarded for income tax purposes, and the income taxed to the grantor at his or her individual income tax rate. These rules were quite effective in eliminating many of the strategies that the IRS viewed as abusive.

Many years later, creative estate planners began to take advantage of the grantor trust rules by purposefully violating them in the creation of an "Intentionally Defective Grantor Trust" or IDGT. The IDGT is an irrevocable trust that is established during the lifetime of the grantor and is used to remove assets from the estate of the grantor. If the proper rules are violated, the trust assets will not be included in the grantor's estate at death, but the income from the trust will be taxed to the grantor. Given that the same amount of income will be taxed at a lower marginal income tax rate when reported on a Form 1040 as opposed to a Form 1041 (at least until the trust income reaches \$415,050), this strategy will usually result in lower overall income taxes. In addition, because the grantor is legally liable to pay the income tax for the trust from his or her personal funds, the income and principal of the trust are preserved to compound on a tax-free basis. This is very desirable since it reduces the size of the grantor's taxable estate while allowing assets outside the taxable estate to grow at a faster rate.

In more recent years, a select group of California elder law attorneys have begun using the Medi-Cal Intentionally Defective Grantor Trust, or MIDGT, especially as a vehicle to hold title to a residence for Medi-Cal purposes. The MIDGT is an excellent planning vehicle because it removes the residence or other asset from the estate of the Medi-Cal recipient for purposes of recovery by the Department of Health Services while maintaining important income tax advantages such as the Section 121 exclusion and step-up in basis at death, at least until 2010.

B. Income Taxation of First Party Versus Third Party SNTs

A Special Needs Trust may be taxed as either a grantor trust or a non-grantor trust, depending upon the circumstances surrounding its creation.

A First Party SNT is a Special Needs Trust that is created by the disabled beneficiary. It typically holds the proceeds from the settlement of the lawsuit resulting from the actions that created the beneficiary's disability or an outright inheritance from a third party. This type of trust is authorized under 42 U.S.C. § 1396p(d)(4)(A). It is commonly referred to as a Litigation SNT or a (d)(4)(A) Trust.

A (d)(4)(A) Trust is characterized as a First Party or Self Created SNT because the funds used to establish the trust belong to the disabled beneficiary. This is true even if the disabled beneficiary never directly received the litigation or inheritance proceeds and such proceeds were instead paid directly to the (d)(4)(A) Trust.

First Party SNTs are generally characterized as grantor trusts for income tax purposes because the grantor is the source of the trust assets and the grantor retains a beneficial interest in the trust income and principal, even if that beneficial interest is restricted by the fact that distributions are at the full discretion of the trustee and can generally be made only for purposes that are supplemental to any benefits that the disabled beneficiary would receive from whatever government assistance programs for which he or she has qualified for. As a grantor trust, the income from a First Party Trust will be taxed to the disabled beneficiary. While this can on occasion generate negative results, it is generally beneficial. This is because the disabled beneficiary will usually be in a very low income tax bracket and the beneficiary may also have large medical expenses that will qualify as deductions on the beneficiary's income tax return.

On occasion, the trustee of a large (d)(4)(A) SNT may find it hard to distribute all of the SNT's income. The trustee of a smaller (d)(4)(A) SNTs may have the opposite

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experience. Depending on the deductions available to the trust, it may be more desirable on these occasions to attempt to qualify a smaller (d)(4)(A) SNTs as non-grantor trust. This may allow the SNT to take tax deductions that would otherwise be subject to the two percent floor for miscellaneous itemized deductions if taken as a deduction by the disabled beneficiary and it may also allow the (d)(4)(A) SNT to qualify as a Qualified Disability Trust.

A Third Party SNT is a Special Needs Trust created by someone other than the disabled beneficiary. Third Party SNTs are often created by the parents or grandparents of a special needs person. The Third Party SNT can be created during the lifetime of the grantor. In the case the trust is generally drafted as a stand-alone document. The trust is usually irrevocable, but is sometimes drafted as a revocable trust.

If created during lifetime, the Third Party SNT can be drafted as either a grantor trust or a non-grantor trust. If drafted as a grantor trust, the income from the SNT would be taxable to the third party creator. This is usually advantageous because this allows the SNT assets to grow at a faster rate (since they are not being depleted by taxes) and because the creator is usually being taxed at a lower tax rate than would be applicable if the Third Party SNT was being taxed as a non-grantor trust. If drafted as a grantor trust, the grantor trust status would terminate upon the death of the creator(s) and the trust would thereafter be taxed as a non-grantor trust.

If drafted as a non-grantor trust, the lifetime Third Party SNT would report its income on its own income tax return and pay the taxes on its income from trust income or principal. The non-grantor Third Party SNT would be subject to the compressed tax rates for trusts, so it would generally pay a greater tax on accumulated income than a Third

Party SNT drafted as a grantor trust. However, if the non-grantor Third Party SNT's accumulated income is anticipated to always remain relatively modest, there may be an advantage in drafting the SNT as a non-grantor trust so that it could qualify for Qualified Disability Trust status.

A Third Party SNT can also come into existence as the result of the death of a third party who provides for the creation of a SNT for the benefit of a disabled beneficiary under the terms of his or her Will or Revocable Living Trust. In this case, the Third Party SNT will be taxed as a non-grantor trust.

C. Grantor Trust Rules

Certain powers, held by the grantor or the trustee or others can cause the trust to be a "grantor trust" under the Internal Revenue Code. A grantor trust is taxed to the grantor as though it were the same person. A trust may be a grantor trust as to the income, the principal, or both. If a trust is a grantor trust, it is taxed to the grantor, including all items of income, deduction, etc.

The grantor trust rules are exceedingly complex. It is much easier to make a trust a grantor trust than it is to ensure that it is not a grantor trust during the life of the grantor.

The following powers cause a trust to be a grantor trust:

Section 673— Reversionary Interest. If the grantor retains a reversionary interest in the trust that is worth 5 percent or more of the value of that interest, this causes the trust to be a grantor trust. An example of a reversionary interest would be "income to Mary for life and principal to Mary or Mary's estate if she survives the grantor, otherwise to the grantor." Assuming that there is at least a 5 percent chance that the grantor will outlive Mary, the trust is a grantor trust. Because this type of provision could cause trust

assets to be characterized as available or subject to recovery by the Department of Health Services, this type of provision should never be included in a Special Needs Trust.

Section 674 — Power to Control Beneficial Enjoyment. This section covers situations in which someone has a "power of disposition." Such a power could include the right to distribute income or principal of from the trust. The power could be held by a trustee. However, for most purposes of this section, the power could be held by someone else, such as the holder of a limited power of appointment.

Internal Revenue Code § 674(a) provides:

The grantor shall be treated as the owner of any portion of a trust in respect of which the beneficial enjoyment of the corpus or the income therefrom is subject to a power of disposition, exercisable by the grantor or a nonadverse party,¹ or both, without the approval or consent of any adverse party.²

This power is often created by the insertion of a limited or special power of appointment³ into the Special Needs Trust. Note that the grantor who holds a limited power of appointment does not actually have to have the physical or mental capacity to actually exercise the power in order to create grantor trust status; the grantor need only have the right to exercise it. This is especially important when drafting First Party Special Needs Trusts where the grantor beneficiary lacks such capacity.

A power exercisable only by Will "other than a power in the grantor to appoint by Will the income of the trust where the income is accumulated for such disposition by the grantor or may be so accumulated in the discretion of the grantor or a non-adverse party, or both, without the consent or approval of any adverse party"⁴ is an important exception to Internal

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Revenue Code § 674(a) that is relevant to drafters of Special Needs Trusts. The provision appears to make the insertion of a testamentary limited power of appointment into a SNT not sufficient to cause the SNT to attain grantor trust status. The perception is not correct, however. The Internal Revenue Code makes reference to two types of income – accounting income and ordinary income. When the Code refers to “income” it is referring to accounting income, which includes capital gains. Ordinary income, which is referred to as such under the Code, is limited to items as such as interest, dividends and rent. Because a Special Needs Trust will accumulate ordinary income and capital gains and add them to the principal of the trust, if not distributed to the special needs beneficiary on a discretionary basis, the grantor’s use of a limited power of appointment should create grantor trust status.

Further support for the position that a testamentary limited power of appointment can be used in a Special Needs Trust to create grantor trust status can be found at Treasury

Reg. § 1.674(b)-1(b)(3), which states:

[I]f a trust instrument provides that the income is payable to another person for his life, but the grantor has a testamentary power of appointment over the remainder, and under the trust instrument and local law capital gains are added to corpus, the grantor is treated as the owner of a portion of the trust and capital gains and losses are included in that portion.

Of course, greater certainty that a grantor trust is created can be achieved by using a lifetime limited power of appointment, rather than a testamentary one, when creating the Special Needs Trust.

Another exception is Internal Revenue Code § 674(b)(5) (A), which

states the general rule shall not apply to:

A power to distribute corpus... to or for the beneficiary or to or for a class of beneficiaries (whether or not income beneficiaries) provided that the power is limited by a reasonably definite standard which is set forth in the trust instrument.

Given that a SNT should be drafted with fully discretionary distribution language with no standard present, the exemption should be inapplicable. An further instruction to the trustee to limit distributions to only those that supplement, but do not supplant, any government assistance available to the trustee, or words of a similar nature, should not be held to be an ascertainable standard.⁵

A power that is sometimes given to create grantor trust status is the power to add charitable beneficiaries to receive a portion of the trust remainder after the death of the special needs beneficiary. If given to an independent party, such as a trust protector, this power will create grantor trust status.⁶

Section 675 – Administrative Powers. If any person acting in a non-fiduciary capacity, without the consent of someone in a fiduciary capacity, has the power to reacquire the trust corpus by substituting other property of an equivalent value, the trust is a grantor trust.⁷ If the grantor holds the power the trust would be a grantor trust. It also appears that such a power would not cause inclusion for estate tax purposes.⁸ In Jordahl, the grantor held the power in a fiduciary capacity. The weight of authority finds that Jordahl would also apply in the case of a power held by the grantor in a non-fiduciary capacity.⁹ However, there is still some risk that the power to reacquire assets could be a power that would cause inclusion in the estate of the grantor under Internal Revenue Code §§ 2036, 2039, or 2042. One could hypothesize circumstances in which

the option to reacquire property, even at fair market value, would be a valuable option.

Note, however, the power may be held by any person acting in a non-fiduciary capacity without the consent of someone in a fiduciary capacity. So, it would seem that a person other than the grantor could hold such a power to avoid the potential argument for inclusion that would arise if the grantor held the power. Some commentators have expressed concern with the view, since the power is one to “reacquire” trust assets. It is not clear whether a person that never had the assets would ever be able to “reacquire” the assets. The Internal Revenue Service has indicated in several rulings that someone other than the grantor could acquire the assets. However, these rulings do not address the quandry of a non-grantor’s ability to “reacquire” assets that he or she never owned previously.¹⁰

It is possible that the Department of Health Services could assert that this power, held by the grantor who is also the special needs beneficiary (such as with a (d)(4)(A) SNT) could somehow cause the trust assets to become available resources. While the author believes that it is unlikely the Department of Health Services would prevail with such an argument, it seems that the better course of action would be to give this power to someone other than the grantor/beneficiary.

Section 676 – Power to Revoke. The power to revoke or amend a trust makes the trust a grantor trust. As the assets in a self-created revocable trust would be considered available for SSI eligibility purposes, revocable trusts are generally not used for Special Needs planning purposes.¹¹

Section 677 – Income for Benefit of Grantor. If the income of the trust is used for the benefit of the grantor or the grantor’s spouse or may be so used in the discretion of the grantor

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or a nonadverse party, or both, the trust is a grantor trust. However, this does not apply if the trust income may only be so applied with the consent of an adverse party.

The IRS recently held that a (d)(4)(A) Trust was a grantor trust because the trustee had the discretion to distribute the income of the trust to the grantor / special needs beneficiary.¹²

D. Reimbursement of Grantor / Special Needs Beneficiary for Income Taxes Paid

Grantor trust status has some obvious and some less obvious implications. The grantor must pay the tax, which means of course that the trust need not pay the tax. Income from the trust is reported on the grantor's personal income tax return. When set up for estate tax planning reasons, this has the effect of allowing the assets in the trust to grow income-tax-free. Essentially, this is the equivalent of the grantor transferring the amount of the income tax to the trust without paying gift taxes. The grantor is not making a gift to the trust by paying the trust's income tax when the grantor has a legal obligation to do so and there is no right of reimbursement.¹³

This benefit is generally not applicable to Special Needs Trusts, as the grantor/disabled beneficiary does not usually have a taxable estate. Of even greater concern is the fact the disabled beneficiary may not have the funds available to pay the income tax for which he or she will be liable. For many years the question that remained unanswered was whether the Special Needs Trust could pay the income tax or reimburse the grantor without adverse income tax or estate tax consequences. That question was answered in 2004.

In Rev. Rul. 2004-64, 2004-27 I.R.B. 7 (July 1, 2004), the IRS addressed the issue of whether a grantor trust can pay the tax liability of the grantor.

Previous to the Ruling, it had been feared that if the grantor trust paid the tax liability of the grantor that the grantor trust may lose its grantor trust status or that payment of the income tax would cause inclusion in the taxable estate of the grantor under Internal Revenue Code § 2036.

Rev. Rul. 2004-64 provided that there is no loss of grantor trust status or inclusion in the estate of the grantor where (a) neither state law nor the trust instrument itself contains any provision requiring or permitting the trustee to distribute to the grantor an amount sufficient to satisfy the grantor's income tax liability or (b) the trust instrument provides that the trustee may, in the trustee's discretion, distribute to the grantor trust income or trust principal sufficient to satisfy the grantor's tax liability. The IRS opined that should the trust instrument or state law require the trustee to distribute to the grantor income or trust principal in an amount sufficient to satisfy the grantor's income tax liability, the trust assets would be includible in the grantor's estate at death under Internal Revenue Code § 2036(a). This is because the grantor would have retained the right to have trust property expended to discharge his legal obligation. Based on this Ruling, it appears that the prudent course of action in drafting a SNT that is intended to qualify for grantor trust status is to include a provision that the trustee may, in his or her discretion, pay for the benefit of the grantor, an amount from the trust income or principal sufficient to pay the grantor's federal and state income tax liability attributable to the SNT's income.

II. Gift Tax and Estate Tax Issues

C. First Party Trusts

1. Gift Tax Issues

A gift is a transfer for property for less than full and adequate consideration. The transfer of property constitutes a completed gift to the extent that the donor has

parted with dominion and control of the property.¹⁴ In the case of the funding of a First Party Trust to hold litigation proceeds resulting from a negotiated settlement, it should be considered that there is no gift from the grantor to the trust because the amount received from the settlement is in exchange for a release of claim for consideration. Furthermore, the disabled grantor does not intend to make a gift because the First Party Trust is intended to be for the sole benefit of the disabled grantor. Finally, if the grantor retains a power over the disposition of the trust assets, such as a limited power of appointment at death, there would be no completed gift for gift tax purposes.¹⁵

With regard to a First Party Trust to hold an inheritance, the argument of a transfer for full and adequate consideration is not as great. However, it still can be argued that the disabled grantor does not intend to make a gift because the First Party Trust is intended to be for the sole benefit of the disabled grantor. In addition, if the SNT is drafted with a limited power of appointment in favor of the grantor, there would be no completed gift for gift tax purposes.

If the IRS were to successfully make an argument that there is a completed gift to the First Party Trust, it would be very difficult to value such gift. The SNT is intended to be for the sole benefit of the disabled grantor during the grantor's lifetime. Distributions from the SNT are at the sole discretion of the trustee, so the trustee could decide to distribute all the trust assets for the benefit of the disabled grantor during the grantor's lifetime, or very little of the trust assets. For some grantors, their disabilities may be such that it might be possible for an actuary to predict with reasonable accuracy the amount and timing of distributions. For other grantors, this may not be possible. For those situations where it is not possible to determine the value of the

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remainder interest, it would not be possible to value of the gift would be incapable of being valued.

2. Estate Tax Issues

The value of the gross estate shall include the value of all property to the extent of any interest therein of which the decedent has at any time made a transfer (except in the case of a bona fide sale for an adequate and full consideration in money or money's worth), by trust or otherwise, under which he has retained for his life or for a period not ascertainable without reference to his death or for any period which does not in fact end before his death – (1) the possession and enjoyment of, or the right to the income from, the property...¹⁶

Given that the funds of (d)(4)(A) SNT are to be used for the sole benefit of the grantor during the grantor's lifetime, Section 2036 would pull the value of the trust assets back into the estate of the grantor for estate tax purposes.¹⁷ The value of an estate that can be passed free of estate taxes in 2016 is \$5.45 million. Given that the estates of most special needs persons, even with inclusion of the value of the SNT, will not exceed this,, estate taxes are generally not of great concern. Even if the value of the estate is over the exempt amount, the claim by the Department of Health Services for recovery against the value of the (d)(4)(A) SNT may bring the value of the estate below the exempt amount.

D. Third Party Trusts

1. Gift Tax Issues

The provisions of a SNT created by a third party grantor during his or her lifetime must be closely scrutinized to determine whether there is a gift for gift tax purposes. If the lifetime SNT is structured as a revocable trust, the gift would not be complete for gift tax purposes. As with the First Party SNT, if the grantor retains a power of appointment there is no completed

gift for gift tax purposes.

If the Third Party SNT is irrevocable and the grantor retains no power of appointment, then it is likely a completed gift has occurred. A gift of a future interest does not qualify for the annual gift tax exclusion amount (\$14,000 per donee per year in 2016).¹⁸ As such, the grantor would have to file a Form 709 Gift Tax Return and apply a portion of his or her Lifetime Gift Tax Exemption Amount (\$5,450,000 in 2016) to shelter the value of the gift to the SNT. To the extent the grantor has inadequate Lifetime Gift Tax Exemption Amount to fully shelter the gift to the Lifetime Third Party Special Needs Trust (either because the gift is more than \$5.45 million or because the grantor has made other gifts previously to which some of the grantor's \$5.45 million Lifetime Gift Tax Exemption Amount had been applied), the grantor would owe a gift tax. For 2016, the gift tax rate is 40 percent. In the case of a married couple, it is possible that they could split the gift, which would allow them both to use their respective Lifetime Gift Tax Exemption Amounts, for a total of \$10.9 million.

Where a grantor is concerned about using up Lifetime Gift Tax Exemption Amount, it is possible to structure a Lifetime Third Party SNT to include "crummey powers."¹⁹ A crummey power is a beneficiary withdrawal right that lapses within a relatively short time, usually 30 to 60 days. If the crummey power holder fails to withdraw the amount designated within that lapse period, the lapsed amount is forfeited and becomes a part of the Lifetime SNT trust estate. Because the beneficiary had the opportunity to withdraw the amount contributed, this creates a present gift as to such amount, and therefore eligible for the \$14,000 per donee annual gift tax exemption amount.

Generally, a Third Party SNT structured in this manner does not contain a crummey withdrawal right

for the special needs beneficiary. The Department of Health Services would assert the amount available to be withdrawn by the special needs beneficiary is an available asset that would potentially disqualify the beneficiary from public assistance. As such, crummey power holders should be limited to the remainder beneficiaries under the Third Party SNT. For a more indepth discussion of crummey powers and how to draft an irrevocable trust containing crummey powers, see *Drafting California Irrevocable Trusts* (CEB 2016), §§ 12.80 -12.110.

2. Estate Tax Issues

The question of whether a Third Party SNT will be included in the estate of the grantor depends on how the trust is drafted. If the Third Party SNT is created during the grantor's lifetime and is structured as a completed gift, the assets of the Third Party SNT will not be included in the grantor's estate at death (assuming that the grantor retained no beneficial interest under the trust which would pull the assets back into the grantor's estate under Internal Revenue Code §§ 2036, 2038 or 2042).

If the Third Party SNT was drafted as a revocable trust or the grantor retained a limited power of appointment over a trust that was otherwise irrevocable (in order to make the gift to the Third Party SNT incomplete for gift tax purposes), then the assets of the Third Party SNT will be included in the grantor's estate at death. If the grantor's estate is less than \$2 million (\$4 million in the case of a married couple that properly structures their estate plan), then inclusion of assets of the Third Party SNT in the estate will not likely be a problem from a federal estate tax perspective. It would also have the added benefit of causing a step-up in basis for income tax purposes for the assets in the Third Party SNT. This will reduce income taxes

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if the SNT trust assets need to be sold after the grantor's death.

If the grantor has a taxable estate, several estate planning strategies can be used to reduce the amount of estate taxes due. These strategies can be combined with an Third Party SNT to not only reduce the amount of estate tax due, but also protect the assets for the special needs beneficiary. Some examples of such strategies include: (a) transferring a residence to a Qualified Personal Residence Trust ("QPRT") with the residence being paid to a Third Party SNT after the expiration of the QPRT term; (b) use of a Grantor Retained Annuity Trust, with the remainder being paid into a Third Party Special Needs Trust; and (c) combining the use of a Family

Limited Partnership with a Defective Grantor Trust/ Third Party Special Needs Trust. These strategies are more thoroughly discussed in the author's article, Tax Efficient Funding of a Lifetime Special Needs Trust at page 32 of 32 Est. Planning J. 10 (Oct. 2005).

Dennis Sandoval, CELA, practices Elder Law in Riverside, CA. He is a Certified Elder Law Attorney and is certified by the California Bar Board of Legal Specialization as a Certified Estate Planning, Trust and Probate Law Specialist, as well as a Certified Taxation Law Specialist. He serves on the Board of Directors of the Special Needs Alliance, the National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys and the National Elder Law Foundation, and is the Director of Education for the American Academy of Estate Planning Attorneys.

Endnotes

- 1 A nonadverse party is defined as any person that is not an adverse party (see definition of adverse party at fn 22 below). Treas. Reg. § 1.672(b)-1
- 2 An adverse party is defined as any person with a substantial beneficial interest (income or remainder) who would be adversely by the exercise or non-exercise of a power. Treas. Reg. § 1.674(a)-1
- 3 A limited or special power of appointment is a power of appointment where the potential appointees are limited to a class defined by the grantor of the power. The class can be defined very narrowly, such as descendants of the grantor, or very broadly, such as the power to appoint to any person other than the power holder, the power holder's estate, the creditors of the power holder or the creditors of the power holder's estate (the ability by the power holder to appoint to himself, to his estate or to the creditors of either would create a general power of appointment rather than a limited power of appointment).
- 4 Internal Revenue Code § 674(b)(3)
- 5 An ascertainable standard is defined in Internal Revenue Code § 2041(b)(1)(A) as a distribution for the health, education, maintenance or support of the beneficiary.
- 6 *Madorin v. Comm'r*, 84 T.C. 667 (1985); PLR 199936031; PLR 9709001
- 7 Internal Revenue Code § 675(3)(c)
- 8 *Estate of Jordahl v. Comm'r*, 65 T.C. 92 (1975)
- 9 PLR 200001015; PLR 200001013; PLR 199922007; PLR 9642039.
- 10 PLR 199908002; PLR 9810019; PLR 9713017
- 11 An exception might be where a parent or grandparent creates a stand-alone, lifetime third party SNT that is not anticipated to receive contributions from any other party and where there are gift tax or estate tax reasons that mandate the use of an irrevocable trust.
- 12 PLR 200620025
- 13 *Comm'r v. Hogel*, 165 F.2d 352 (10th Cir. 1947); *Comm'r v. Beck*, 129 F.2d 243 (2d Cir. 1941).
- 14 Treasury Regulation § 25.2511-2(b)
- 15 Treasury Regulation § 25.2511-2(c)
- 16 Internal Revenue Code § 2036(a)
- 17 PLR 9437034
- 18 See Drafting California Irrevocable Trusts (CEB 2016) §12.80 for more information.
- 19 See *Crummey v. Comm'r*, 397 F.2d 82 (9th Cir. 1968); Rev. Rul. 73-405, 1973-2 C.B. 321. Also see *Estate of Cristofani v. Comm'r.*, 97 T.C. 74 (1991), AOD 1996-010