

# Jay Leno files for conservatorship over wife Mavis, who was diagnosed with dementia: Everything we know

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Jay Leno, 73, has filed for a conservatorship over his 77-year-old wife Mavis's estate after her dementia diagnosis. (Michael Tullberg/Getty Images)

Jay Leno is seeking a conservatorship for his wife of 43 years, Mavis, who's living with dementia.

The filing, obtained by Yahoo Entertainment, was made in Los Angeles Superior Court on Jan. 26. Paperwork initiated on Nov. 1, 2023, and signed by Leno on Nov. 17 said the conservatorship would be of Mavis's estate, or finances, and not her person. It stated that the "sole purpose" of the legal arrangement is to establish a living trust for 77-year-old Mavis that ensures she has "managed assets sufficient to provide her with future care" if the former *Tonight Show* host dies before her.

A hearing is set for April 9 at the Stanley Mosk Courthouse in L.A. According to the capacity declaration signed by Dr. Hart Cohen on Nov. 28, Mavis should not be required to attend court hearings, due to her "medical inability." She has "major impairment" when it comes to her orientation (knowing where she is), short- and long-term memory processing and

concentration, the document states. She also experiences anxiety and depression, so mandating that she attend “would cause her undue stress, confusion, and anguish” and “be detrimental to her mental and physical health,” according to the doctor.

“There's so much controversy around conservatorships — with the Cher one going on right now and obviously Britney [Spears] and Michael Oher,” California-based [top family law attorney](#) Chris Melcher, a partner at [Walzer Melcher & Yoda](#), tells Yahoo of the legal arrangement, also known as a guardianship, in which a court appoints a person or organization to care for someone who has been ruled incapable of caring for themselves because of mental health issues, disability, advanced age or other reasons. “But this seems to be a standard situation. They’ve had a long marriage — over 40 years. ... It seems beneficial. ... It's really sad to have a spouse have the inability to provide for her own needs, and it's natural that the other spouse would do that.”

Conservatorship, trust will ensure “Mavis’s future care is provided for”

According to the court documents, Jay — who is estimated by multiple outlets to be worth around \$450 million — “has always handled the couple’s finances throughout the term of their forty-three year marriage, and will continue to do so until his passing.”

The conservatorship is “being established for the sole purpose of” ensuring Mavis's estate plan will be executed and that her “future care is provided for under the terms of a living trust” should Jay predecease her. The estate plan, including the trust and a will, will also provide for her brother, who is described as “her sole living heir aside from Jay.”

Mavis’s “current condition renders her incapable of executing the estate plan,” the documents say. “Unfortunately, Mavis has been progressively losing capacity and orientation to space and time for several years,” making conservatorship necessary.

For now, however, “Jay is fully capable of continuing his support for Mavis’s physical and financial needs as he has throughout their marriage.” The filing also says Jay “believes ... that Mavis consents to the conservatorship of the estate and to Jay’s appointment as her conservator and that she would not prefer anyone else to be appointed.”

Melcher, who is not working on this case, says he sees it as Jay taking steps to “prevent [Mavis] from being taken advantage of because of her dementia.”

“It’s not like the Cher [situation]” — the singer is fighting to put her adult son Elijah Blue Allman, who lives with addiction, into a conservatorship — which “raises a lot of red flags,” he says. “This is something unfortunately that a lot of spouses see happen to them. It seems like good planning. It's protective. He just wants to get it done in advance.”

If Jay — with all his wealth — died without this trust, “It would just be a long, complicated mess with a lot of people probably circling around because it's so much money,” Melcher says. With a conservatorship in place, if Jay does die before his wife, an appointed trustee “would be able to immediately start making decisions” for Mavis, and her care would be more seamless.

Jay has long looked out for Mavis, proposing, in part, to get her health insurance

The *Jay Leno's Garage* star met Mavis at the famed Comedy Store in L.A. in the 1970s. She said to the friend she was with that night, "That comedian is gorgeous!" Then, after his set, Leno stopped Mavis, who is four years his senior, asking her, "Are you that girl in front?" she told the Los Angeles Times in 2014. "And I said, 'Yes, that was me.'" It was on from there.

Mavis told People in 1987 that she "always had this idea that I would never get married," citing her feminist beliefs. "But with Jay, I began to realize that this was the first time I was ever with someone where I had a perfect, calm sense of having arrived at my destination."

Jay's marriage proposal came after they bought a house together. Thinking ahead about her well-being, he suggested they marry so she could be covered by his insurance policy.

"I thought if something happened to me, my girlfriend wouldn't be covered, but if we're married, we're covered, so ... we might as well get married," he told the Los Angeles Times. "Not the most romantic." He later presented her with a diamond ring.

They married on Nov. 3, 1980 — picking the date because it was the wedding anniversary of his parents. The couple has no children, which Mavis — who's on the Feminist Majority Foundation's board of directors — told The Washington Post in 2014 she "takes full credit for." She told the same outlet her husband "is probably the single kindest human being I ever met."

Navigating her husband's TV stardom was challenging after he landed *The Tonight Show* — which he helmed from 1992 to 2014 — she told the L.A. Times. All of a sudden, "every person on the planet was asking him for something." She also spoke about personal challenges they navigated, dealing with family deaths and getting used to his fortune. "We started off with not very much money, and now we have a lot. But we've stayed the same. The great thing about Jay is whatever he says, that's it. It's genuine," she said.

Asked in a 2019 interview with People for the secret to their long-lasting union, Jay quipped, "not screwing around." Mavis visited Jay when he guest-hosted *The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson* in 1990. On a more serious note, he added, "I always tell guys when they meet a woman ... 'Marry someone who's the person you wish you could be, and it works out OK.'"

It's unclear when Mavis was diagnosed with dementia. When Jay suffered severe second-degree burns on his face, upper body, left arm and hands in a fire in his garage in November 2022, he talked about how doctors advised him to immediately go to a burn center, but instead he drove home and stayed there for the night, explaining, "Well, my wife doesn't drive anymore. I didn't want her stuck and not knowing what was going on. It just seemed like the right thing to do — and I think it was."

Dr. Peter Grossman, who treated Leno at his Grossman Burn Center, said at the time that Mavis was "by his side" during his recovery. "They have a very close relationship, and she's doing as well as you can expect a wife who is concerned about her husband."

The couple was on the red carpet very recently — on Nov. 7, 2023, for the 60th Anniversary at The Improv at Hollywood Improv. By then, Jay had initiated the conservatorship filing, per the court documents.

Even after the filing, Mavis has been spotted out with her husband. Jay performed Sunday at the Comedy & Magic Club in Hermosa Beach, Calif., and the two held hands as they walked into the venue and Mavis chatted with friends, TMZ reports.

The next day, Leno told the Daily Mail, "I just set up a will, in case something happens." He added that Mavis is "fine. Everybody's good. We're doing well."

They will mark 44 years of marriage in November.