

AGENCY IN REAL ESTATE TRANSACTIONS

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Buyers and sellers of real estate are often confused about the role of real estate agents and real estate agency relationships. Many states, including Maryland, require that agents give buyers and sellers an agency disclosure form to sign. This form is not an agreement; it is a disclosure. It discloses the various natures of possible agency relationships, and it is important that buyers and sellers read the forms carefully to be better prepared to select the type of agency relationship they want.

Dual agency is a relationship in which the brokerage firm represents both the buyer and the seller in the same real estate transaction. Dual agency relationships do not carry with them all of the traditional fiduciary duties to clients. Instead, dual agents owe limited fiduciary duties. Because of the potential for conflicts of interest in a dual agency relationship, it's vital that all parties give their informed consent. In many states, including Maryland, this consent must be in writing. Disclosed dual agency, in which both the buyer and the seller are told that the agent is representing both of them, is legal in most states – but not Maryland.

Dual agency can happen even if the buyer is represented by an agent other than the listing agent if that agent is also employed by the same broker. It is the employing broker's relationship with the seller that determines dual agency.

It's important to understand what legal responsibilities your real estate salesperson has to you and to other parties in the transaction. Ask what type of agency relationship your agent has with you:

Seller's representative (also known as a listing agent or seller's agent)

A seller's agent is hired by and represents the seller. All fiduciary duties are owed to the seller. The agency relationship usually is created by a listing contract.

Buyer's representative (also known as a buyer's agent)

A buyer's agent is hired by prospective buyers to represent them in a real estate transaction. The buyer's rep works in the buyer's best interest throughout the transaction and owes fiduciary duties to the buyer. The buyer can pay the licensee directly through a negotiated fee, or the buyer's rep may be paid by the seller or through a commission split with the seller's agent.

Disclosed dual agent

Dual agency is a relationship in which the brokerage firm represents both the buyer and the seller in the same real estate transaction. Dual agency relationships do not carry with them all of the traditional fiduciary duties to clients. Instead, dual agents owe limited fiduciary duties. Because of the potential for conflicts of interest in a dualagency relationship, it's vital that all parties give their informed consent. In many states, this consent must be in writing. Disclosed dual agency, in which both the buyer and the seller are told that the agent is representing both of them, is legal in most states.

Designated agent (also called appointed agent)

This is a brokerage practice that allows the managing broker to designate which licensees in the brokerage will act as an agent of the seller and which will act as an agent of the buyer. Designated agency avoids the problem of creating a dual-agency relationship for licensees at the brokerage. The designated agents give their clients full representation, with all of the attendant fiduciary duties. The broker still has the responsibility of supervising both groups of licensees.

Two State of Maryland forms deal with this issue. The first one, entitled: ***Understanding Whom Real Estate Agents Represent*** is reprinted here in its entirety. As is the second form, entitled: ***Consent for Dual Agency***.



STATE OF MARYLAND
REAL ESTATE COMMISSION

Understanding Whom Real Estate Agents Represent

THIS NOTICE IS NOT A CONTRACT

In this form "seller" includes "landlord"; "buyer" includes "tenant"; and "purchase" or "sale" includes "lease"

Agents Who Represent the Seller

Seller's Agent: A seller's agent works for the real estate company that lists and markets the property for the sellers and exclusively represents the sellers. A Seller's agent may assist the buyer in purchasing the property, but his or her duty of loyalty is only to the seller.

Subagent: A Subagent means a licensed real estate broker, licensed associate real estate broker, or licensed real estate salesperson who is not affiliated with or acting as the listing real estate broker for a property, is not a buyer's agent, has an agency relationship with the seller, and assists a prospective buyer in the acquisition of real estate for sale in a non-agency capacity. The subagent works for a real estate company different from the company for which the seller's agent works. The subagent can assist a buyer in purchasing a property, but his or her duty of loyalty is only to the seller.

If you are viewing a property listed by the company with whom the agent accompanying you is affiliated, and you have not signed a Buyer Agency Agreement and a "Consent for Dual Agency" form, that agent is representing the seller

Agents Who Represent the Buyer

Buyer's Agent : A buyer may enter into a written contract with a real estate broker which provides that the broker will represent the buyer in locating a property to buy. The agent from that broker's company is then known as the buyer's agent. The buyer's agent assists the buyer in evaluating properties and preparing offers and developing negotiation strategies and works in the best interest of the buyer. The agent's fee is paid according to the written agreement between the broker and the buyer. If you as a buyer wish to have an agent represent you, you must enter into a written buyer agency agreement.

Dual Agents

The possibility of **dual agency** arises when the buyer's agent and the seller's agent both work for the same real estate company, and the buyer is interested in property listed by that company. The real estate broker or the broker's designee, is called the "dual agent." Dual agents do not act exclusively in the interests of either the seller or buyer, and therefore cannot give undivided loyalty to either party. There may be a conflict of interest because the interests of the seller and buyer may be different or adverse.

If both seller and buyer agree to dual agency by signing a Consent For Dual Agency form, the "dual agent" (the broker or the broker's designee) shall assign one agent to represent the seller (the seller's "intra-company agent") and another agent to represent the buyer (the buyer's "intra-company agent"). Intra-company agents are required to provide the same services to their clients that agents provide in transactions not involving dual agency, including advising their clients as to price and negotiation strategies.

If either party does not agree to dual agency, the real estate company must withdraw the agency agreement for that particular property with either the buyer or seller, or both. If the seller's agreement is terminated, the seller must then either represent him or herself or arrange to be represented by an agent from another real estate broker/company. If the buyer's agreement is terminated, the buyer may choose to enter into a written buyer agency agreement with a different broker/ company. Alternatively, the buyer may choose not to be represented by an agent of his or her own but simply to receive assistance from the seller's agent, from another agent in that company, or from a subagent from another company.

No matter what type of agent you choose to work with, you have the following rights and responsibilities in selling or buying property:

>Real estate agents are obligated by law to treat all parties to a real estate transaction honestly and fairly. They must exercise reasonable care and diligence and maintain the confidentiality of clients. They must not discriminate in the offering of properties; they must promptly present each written offer or counteroffer to the other party; and they must answer questions truthfully.

>Real estate agents must disclose all material facts that they know or should know relating to a property. An agent's duty to maintain confidentiality does not apply to the disclosure of material facts about a property.

>All agreements with real estate brokers and agents must be in writing and explain the duties and obligations of both the broker and the agent. The agreement must explain how the broker and agent will be paid and any fee-sharing agreements with other brokers.

>You have the responsibility to protect your own interests. You should carefully read all agreements to make sure they accurately reflect your understanding. A real estate licensee is qualified to advise you on real estate matters only. If you need legal or tax advice, it is your responsibility to consult a licensed attorney or accountant.

Any complaints about a real estate licensee may be filed with the Real Estate Commission at 500 North Calvert Street, Baltimore, MD 21202. (410) 230-6205

We, the Sellers/Landlord Buyers/Tenants acknowledge receipt of a copy of this disclosure and that _____ (firm name) and _____ (salesperson) are working as:

(You may check more than one box but not more than two)

- seller/landlord's agent
- subagent of the Seller
- buyer's /tenant's agent

Signature (Date)

Signature (Date)

* * * * *

I certify that on this date I made the required agency disclosure to the individuals identified below and they were **unable or unwilling** to acknowledge receipt of a copy of this disclosure statement

Name of Individual to whom disclosure made

Name of Individual to whom disclosure made

Agent's Signature

(Date)



STATE OF MARYLAND
REAL ESTATE COMMISSION

Consent for Dual Agency

(In this form, the word "seller" includes "landlord"; "buyer" includes "tenant"; and "purchase" or "sale" includes "lease")

When Dual Agency May Occur

The possibility of Dual Agency arises when:

- 1) The buyer is interested in a property listed by a real estate broker; and
- 2) The seller's agent and the buyer's agent are affiliated with the same real estate broker.

Important Considerations Before Making a Decision About Dual Agency

A broker or the broker's designee, acting as a dual agent does not exclusively represent either the seller or buyer; there may be a conflict of interest because the interests of the seller and buyer may be different or adverse. As a dual agent, the real estate broker does not owe undivided loyalty to either the seller or buyer.

Before the buyer and seller can proceed to be represented by a broker acting as a dual agent, they must both sign Consent for Dual Agency. If the buyer has previously signed Consent for Dual Agency, the buyer must **affirm** the buyer's consent for the purchase of a particular property before an offer to purchase is presented to the seller. If the seller has previously signed Consent for Dual Agency, the seller must **affirm** the seller's consent for the sale of the property to a particular buyer before accepting an offer to purchase the property. The **affirmation** is contained on Page 2 of this form.

Your Choices Concerning Dual Agency

In a possible dual agency situation, the buyer and seller have the following options:

1. **Consent in writing to dual agency.** If all parties consent in writing, the real estate broker or the broker's designee (the "dual agent") shall assign one real estate agent affiliated with the broker to represent the seller (the seller's "intra-company agent") and another agent affiliated with the broker to represent the buyer (the buyer's "intra-company agent"). Intra-company agents are required to provide the same services to their clients that agents provide in transactions not involving dual agency, including advising their clients as to price and negotiation strategy.
2. **Refuse to consent to dual agency.** If either party refuses to consent in writing to dual agency, the real estate broker must terminate the brokerage relationship for that particular property with the buyer, the seller, or both. If the seller's agreement is terminated, the seller must then either represent him or herself or arrange to be represented by another real estate company. If the buyer's agreement is terminated, the buyer may choose not to be represented by an agent of his or her own but simply to receive assistance from the seller's agent, from another agent in that company, or from a subagent from another company. Alternatively, the buyer may choose to enter into a written buyer agency agreement with a different broker/company.

Duties of a Dual Agent and Intra-Company Agent

Like other agents, unless the client gives consent to disclose the information, dual agents and intra-company agents must keep confidential information about a client's bargaining position or motivations. For example, without written consent of the client, a dual agent or intra-company agent may not disclose to the other party, or the other party's agent:

- 1) Anything the client asks to be kept confidential; *
- 2) That the seller would accept a lower price or other terms;
- 3) That the buyer would accept a higher price or other terms;
- 4) The reasons why a party wants to sell or buy, or that a party needs to sell or buy quickly; or
- 5) Anything that relates to the negotiating strategy of a party.

* **Dual agents and intra-company agents must disclose material facts about a property to all parties.**

How Dual Agents Are Paid

Only the broker receives compensation on the sale of a property listed by that broker.

If a financial bonus is offered to an agent who sells property that is listed with his/her broker, this fact must be disclosed in writing to both the buyer and seller.

Consent for Dual Agency

I have read the above information, and I understand the terms of the dual agency. I understand that I do not have to consent to a dual agency and that if I **refuse** to consent, there will not be a dual agency; and that I may withdraw the consent at any time upon notice to the dual agent. I hereby **consent** to have

_____ act as a Dual Agent for me as the
(Firm Name)

_____ **Seller** in the sale of the property at: _____.

_____ **Buyer** in the purchase of a property listed for sale with the above-referenced broker.

Signature

Date

Signature

Date

AFFIRMATION OF PRIOR CONSENT TO DUAL AGENCY

- The undersigned **Buyer(s)** hereby affirm(s) consent to dual agency for the following property:

Property Address

Signature

Date

Signature

Date

- The undersigned **Seller(s)** hereby affirm(s) consent to dual agency for the Buyer(s) identified below:

Name(s) of Buyer(s)

Signature

Date

Signature

Date

DISCLAIMER

John P. Hale is a licensed real estate agent in Maryland and Pennsylvania. He is affiliated with Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage in Westminster, Maryland. John has been licensed since 2000 and also practiced in Tucson, Arizona for many years. Mr. Hale holds the following designations and certifications awarded by the National Association of REALTORS® (NAR) and other authorized institutions: ABR-Accredited Buyers Representative, AHWD-At Home With Diversity, CNE-Certified Negotiation Expert, CRMS-Certified Risk Management Specialist, CRS-Certified Residential Specialist, CTA-Certified Tourism Ambassador, e-PRO-Online Real Estate Practice, GRI-Graduate of Realtor Institute, MRE-Master of Real Estate, MREP-Mortgage Real Estate Professional, and MRP-Military Relocation Professional.

Please note that this article was written by John to provide objective information and to also reflect his opinion of good practice at the time of its' writing for the general benefit of those considering sale or purchase of real estate. It is not intended as definitive legal advice and you should not act upon it as such without seeking independent legal and financial counsel. Frequent changes in the law and standards of practice may cause this information to become outdated and no longer applicable or incorrect.