

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

AG Nessel, Humane Society of the United States Warn Consumers of Heightened Puppy Scams During Pandemic

LANSING – Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel and the Humane Society of the United States are [urging consumers to be wary of puppy scams](#) as many people seek to purchase or adopt dogs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Given the increased number of those staying at home during the ongoing public health emergency, many are turning to the internet to adopt a furry friend for companionship. The Michigan Department of Attorney General has seen a surge in complaints of internet scammers exploiting this situation. Several Michiganders have recently been tricked into paying for pets that do not exist. And, because these thieves are often outside the country, the prospects of getting money back are extremely low.

“Scammers are looking for any way to take advantage of consumers during this pandemic and puppies are unfortunately not exempt,” Nessel said. “While many people may be eager to bring home a puppy during this time, I urge Michiganders to be vigilant in their search to avoid being scammed. My office continues to prioritize protecting residents from predatory and deceptive business practices, and these puppy scams will ultimately result in heartbreak and financial loss. Always do your homework before making any purchase online to avoid being taken advantage of.”

In addition to the deceptive practices of advertising puppies that do not exist or charging exorbitant fees, scammers are taking advantage of the pandemic as they use it as a reason to avoid in-person visits and demand additional fees.

“Taking advantage of Michiganders by exploiting our love of animals is as cruel to the people as it is to the dogs. We are very grateful to General Nessel’s office for taking this issue seriously,” said Molly Tamulevich, Michigan State Director for the Humane Society of the United States.

Each year, consumers in the U.S. spend more than \$1 billion buying puppies without realizing they may be doing business with scammers, puppy mill operators or both. Puppy mills are inhumane, dog breeding operations that keep dogs in overcrowded and unhealthy conditions and, depending on location, many are not regulated or inspected. Breeders hide their poor conditions by meeting buyers at offsite locations or selling through pet stores or online.

Since 2018, the Michigan Department of Attorney General has received nearly 50 complaints of alleged puppy scams - 26 of these complaints came in this year alone.

The Michigan Department of Attorney General previously provided tips to help consumers spot and avoid puppy scams. Consumers should remain hyper-vigilant when purchasing a puppy online. The below best practices can help consumers avoid falling victim to these scams:

- Research the breed
- Research the breeder
- Research the advertised puppy
- Do not purchase a puppy sight-unseen
- Use a credit card to make the purchase
- Retain all documents and communications from the breeder
- Consider contacting your local shelter

To view the [consumer alert, click here](#).

Michigan consumers who believe they have been a victim of a puppy scam can [file a complaint with the Attorney General's Consumer Protection team online](#).