



Puppy and Kitten Purchase Scams

CONSUMER ADVISORY

Are you in the process of adopting a new puppy or kitten? - Be careful!

WHAT WE ARE SEEING

According to the Better Business Bureau, the number of fraudulent and non-existent breeders has never been higher. Incidents are happening on a regional and national level. In 2017, the BBB received 884 complaints specific to puppy or kitten fraud, which resulted in losses of \$448,123. So far in 2020 (as of Nov 30th), they have received 3969 complaints, resulting in losses of \$2,843,552. Projections through Dec 31st are 4300 complaints / \$3,100,000 losses.

On a local level, Coloradans who have fallen victim to these scams have sought to purchase pets from out-of-state sources, usually found on the internet. Some incidents have been local purchases. On the surface, most websites look legitimate, showcase beautiful pictures, and provide lengthy descriptions of pets available for adoption. Some websites, highlight pets that have already been given names prior to adoption. Everything looks and sounds ideal. The perfect pet. A credible breeder. Time to move forward and make a payment. Beware, underneath the surface, these same websites contain unsubstantiated content and stock images that can be found across other areas of the internet (visit Google to see how to check for reused images). The website is a facade and a scammer is driving the conversations. The world of COVID-19 makes the scam so much easier to execute because of limited travel and broad restrictions around in-person interactions.

Each individual scam has its differences, but the waterfall of financial losses is consistent. Keep in mind, a pet adoption is more of an emotional buying decision than a logical one. Elevated emotional conditions are circulating around your choice to act or to walk away. Actions intensify if the breeder creates a state of urgency to decide before someone else has a chance to adopt.

Potential financial commitments, therefore losses, start with a large deposit or full payment to the breeder. Then, there is the process of obtaining the pet once it is old enough for adoption. Typically, early visitation is not an option due to COVID-19, and therefore the pet is to be shipped to your location!

Breeder asks for additional funds to purchase a crate, cover shipping, and secure insurance for travel. In some cases, you are then asked to pay additional fees for a USDA license and shots. All of these additional fees can be for substantial amounts and all are over and above the initial cost to buy a pet. Some breeders may ask for unconventional methods of payment that can be hard to trace. In many cases, the final purchase amount is 2-3 times higher than the cost of the actual pet. Ouch!

In the end, the buyer spends a lot of money, but never receives the puppy or kitten. In fact, there never was anything to adopt or accessories to support the transaction. The cute little puppy or kitten in the picture was nothing more than a cute picture.

Suggestions: As always, use discretion and dedicate an ample amount of time to research the breeder and their credentials. Seek out online reviews and details to support the purchase. Ask questions and seek validation. Avoid going through a broker. Are you working with a legitimate breeder? Are photos authentic to the website and breeder? Question the need to pay for additional accessories and services. Seek to make payments in person instead of online payment options. Finally, choose a breeder or source where you can actually visit and observe the pet prior to purchase and release of money. A tangible pet and breeder is safer than an intangible one.

Note - The Better Business Bureau indicated that the number of complaints and scams were much higher for puppy adoptions over adoptions for kittens.

REPORT FRAUD

Contact Consumer Fraud Protection
18th Judicial District

Hotline (720) 874-8547 | consumer@da18.state.co.us

