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OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL STATE OF FLORIDA

Florida Attorney General's Office News Release

CA: Beware of Pet Purchasing Scams during Holidays



TALLAHASSEE, Fla.—Attorney General Ashley Moody today issued a Consumer Alert offering tips to safeguard against pet-related holiday scams. The holidays mark a peak time for pet purchases as many Florida families look to welcome new four-legged friends into their homes. Unfortunately, this is also when scams that target consumers with phony or deceptive pet ads run rampant. Even worse, scammers may attempt to sell sick animals, animals with disorders, or returned animals previously deemed unfit for sale to unknowing consumers. Attorney General Moody is urging consumers to use caution when purchasing a pet this holiday season.

Attorney General Ashley Moody said, “This is the time of year when families will often welcome new pets into their homes. Sadly, these families can be taken advantage of by fraudsters who trick them into paying for a pet that is never delivered, or worse, deathly ill. If you plan to give or adopt a pet this holiday season, take steps to ensure you are getting exactly what you pay for.”

Below are tips for avoiding pet scams this holiday season:

·Research a seller before buying any pet advertised in print or online;
·Never wire money to someone before being able to see the animal in person;
·Beware of pet images that look like stock photos—perfectly posed or where the animal does not look real. Conduct an online image search of the photo to see if it is posted elsewhere;
·Try to physically visit the pet before buying it;
·Ask for the pet’s breeder information, including address and USDA license number, if any;
·Ask for veterinary paperwork of the animal and get the veterinarian’s contact information to

confirm the animal's health;
·Have your veterinarian check your new pet immediately after purchase for any illness that would make the pet unfit for sale. If your veterinarian determines that the pet should not have been sold, notify the seller immediately and provide the veterinarian's unfit for sale note;
·Keep the following records when buying a pet:
o The original pet advertisement;
o Emails and notes on conversations with seller or seller's representatives;
o Contracts and sales receipts;
o Refund policy (including any policy relating to COVID-19);
o Financing agreements;
o Health guarantees and certificates;
o Veterinary proof of exams, vaccinations, and required OCVI (Official Certificate of Veterinary Inspection);
o Registration information, if seller claims the pet is registrable (e.g., AKC); and
o Breeder or broker information, including the USDA license number, if any;
·Take photos of the pet selected for purchase, and photos of the actual pet received;
·Know scammers will often come up with complicated reasons why they need immediate wire transfers or cannot deliver the animal to you, often consistently tied to current events; and
·Recognize that offers seemingly too good to be true probably are.

Consumers can file complaints about pet-related scams or other types of fraud by calling the Attorney General's fraud hotline at 1(866) 9NO-SCAM or by filing a complaint online at MyFloridaLegal.com.

To protect new pet owners, any canine offered for sale in Florida must have a Florida Official Certificate of Veterinary Inspection. For more information about the Florida Pet Law, enforced by the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, click here.

Earlier this year, Attorney General Moody filed a complaint against Hoof's Pets, Inc., d/b/a Petland Orlando East and Petland Waterford Lakes, and its owners Geoffrey M. Hoofnagle and Ben W. Hoofnagle for allegedly misrepresenting that puppies sold were fit for sale. To view the complaint, click here.