



Rick Staly, Sheriff

FLAGLER COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

"An honor to serve, a duty to protect."

NEWS RELEASE

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FCSO Urges Residents to Beware of Puppy Scams

The Flagler County Sheriff's Office (FCSO) has received dozens of complaints about puppy scams throughout the county. Since 2020, there have been 10 cases reported to the FCSO and 20 cases reported to the Flagler Beach Police Department (FBPD).

In an effort to bring awareness about these scams and educate the community on preventative measures, FCSO and FBPD have teamed up to provide Flagler County residents on how to verify a legitimate business and how to protect yourself and your family from a scam.

In recent cases, victims have responded to ads on sites like Craigslist and social media platforms. Victims show interest in a puppy listed for sale, move forward with the process to reserve a puppy, put down a deposit or entire amount and the seller disappears.

There are a number of red flags that you should know to help prevent you from becoming a victim:

- The seller prefers to handle communication solely via email and not over the phone.
- Photos posted of the dogs or shared with potential buyers are stock photos. Photos and descriptions of the animal can be found on multiple websites.
- Untraditional payment requests, where the seller asks for wiring of money or payment by gift cards.
- The price is too good to be true.

Recent cases also included fraudulent American Kennel Club (AKC) paperwork where the seller claimed the puppies were AKC certified. AKC-registered animals will always be listed through the AKC. The AKC certification can be verified by calling 919-233-9767, where interested parties can also see if there are any complaints filed about the seller. You can also visit www.akc.org

Legitimate breeders are required by law to meet the minimum standards of humane animal care and treatment established by the Animal Welfare Act (AWA) and enforced by the USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Services (APHIS).

When searching for a furry companion to add to your family, here are some tips to verifying the legitimacy of the individual re-homing or selling the animal:

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1769 East Moody Blvd., Bunnell, FL 32110

386-437-4116 – Fax 386-586-4888

Mailing: P.O. Box 879, Bunnell, FL 32110

www.flaglersheriff.com

- Ask for multiple pictures of the pet, including poses with specific items such as a recent newspaper or tennis ball, to make sure the pet is real.
- Ask for a phone number for the person who's selling/re-homing the pet and the name of the veterinary clinic where the pet has been seen. If the seller won't give the number or it's not a US number, then it's probably a scam! If you are provided phone numbers, call back and ask questions.
- If the seller says they are in a specific state and asks you to send money elsewhere, especially in another country, avoid it.
- If the person is claiming to be a breeder or rescue organization, ask for registration information. (All legitimate businesses and nonprofit organizations will be registered with SunBiz and the Department of Agriculture). You can verify at: <https://dos.myflorida.com/sunbiz/search/>
- Never pay cash via money order or Western Union. Always use a credit card in case you need to dispute charges.
- Be skeptical if the seller adds "additional charges" such as fees for veterinary visits, a different crate, travel expenses, pet insurance, etc. Pet insurance is NOT required for a pet to travel.
- Don't trust a seller that pushes for the sale to happen quickly due to them moving, having to re-home the pet immediately, or stating that harm may come to the puppy if not taken in a timely manner.
- Do your research to get a sense for the breed you're seeking, the seller, or the agency, organization or rescue you're selecting, and ensure you fully understand what is entailed in the cost.

"With the recent incidents of scammers finding new ways to steal money from residents, we want to ensure Flagler County residents are aware of these scams and how to protect themselves," Sheriff Rick Staly said. "It saddens me to see people sinking to this level of using animals to make a quick buck. Be aware and lookout, report suspicious activity and do your research when adding a new pet to your family. We have some great local organizations that can help you adopt a pet, such as the Flagler Humane Society, so if you're considering adopting, please make sure you're selecting a reputable organization or person."

If you are looking to add a four-legged companion to your family, please consider adopting from a local rescue or shelter organization.

View Puppy Scam PSA Here: <https://youtu.be/jQcVzJiX6kM>

Other resources:

BBB (www.bbb.org)

AKC (919-233-9767)

USDA-Licensed Breeders (Animal Care Public Search Tool www.aphis.usda.gov)

Report a Scam: www.pet scams.com

Federal Trade Commission (FTC): reportfraud.ftc.gov

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