TORONTO HUMANE SOCIETY like no other.

Toronto Humane Society Position Statement: Puppy Mills and Kitten Mills

Toronto Humane Society (THS) endorses the responsible adoption of companion animals from local humane societies, established shelters, and rescue organizations operating with demonstrable transparency and acceptable standards of care in handling animals. As community leaders in animal welfare, THS opposes the high-volume breeding of dogs and cats, commonly referred to as puppy or kitten "mills"; these are primarily profit-driven businesses that raise animals in substandard conditions, prioritizing profit over best-practices in animal welfare.

Concerns Over the Mass-Breeding of Animals

THS advocates the well-established and internationally recognized Five Domains Model of Animal Welfare (*see Supporting Resources below*). The Five Domains Model defines categories of welfare-significant factors including Physical and Functional domains of nutrition, environment, health and behaviour and Affective Experience Domain, focused on the mental state of the animal. These are the fundamental requirements of any facility or organization responsible for the care and management of animals of any breed or species and are the basis for assessment of any minimum standard of care.

The term "puppy or kitten mill" generally refers to a large-scale breeding enterprise focused on selling animals for financial gain. These animals are usually housed in squalid conditions with limited space and without access to the outdoors, exercise, or other basic freedoms that ensure their emotional, mental and physical needs are met.

Dogs and cats born from these mills are often purchased by unsuspecting households who are then left to deal with the corresponding risks and consequences. These animals commonly lack appropriate veterinary care and medical and vaccination records are rarely provided. As a result, many puppies and kittens are ill at the time of purchase or have not yet known congenital conditions. New animal families are then burdened with the unforeseen emotional and financial burden of medical care. For example, puppies are particularly susceptible to the distemper virus, a highly contagious disease when raised in cramped living conditions. This virus is costly to treat and especially fatal for puppies -and is easily prevented with vaccinations and good standards of care. In addition, puppy and kitten mills are unlikely to screen for genetic or congenital health issues – such as orthopedic conditions or other heritable diseases. These may be passed along in litters bred intensively to meet demand while disregarding the potential long-term suffering of the animal and emotional and financial toll on their families.

Appropriate socialization, basic training and positive human-animal interactions are vital to the development in puppies and kittens. In addition to health risks, young puppies and kittens raised in 'mill'-type facilities may be more likely to experience behavioural issues due to lack of socialization, prolonged confinement and neglect. These issues often manifest anxiety or fear-based aggression directed at humans and other animals. The family who purchased this animal may be unable or unwilling to manage these issues, leading to the difficult decision to surrender their pet to shelters or rescues that are already strained and under-resourced.

A Starting Point for Change

The prevalence of puppy and kitten mills exist for several reasons, each of which amplifies and reinforces the problem. These include limited provincial legislation governing the breeding and sale of companion animals across Canada.

In June 2024, the Ontario government formally addressed the issue of puppy mills through the passing of the PUPS Act (Preventing Unethical Puppy Sales Act). This Act amends the PAWS Act of 2019 (Provincial Animal Welfare Service Act) and aims to regulate operation of 'mill'-type facilities and eliminate unscrupulous breeding practices. The Act imposes penalties on breeders who fail to comply. The Toronto Humane Society commends the government for establishing a legislative foundation to improve animal welfare.

Equally, and given the pervasiveness of puppy mills in Ontario, we believe more work is needed to successfully tackle this complex issue. Puppy mills operate on private property and behind closed doors, making them difficult to locate and shut down unless reported. To help address this, we support the introduction of a mandatory licensing regime for anyone dealing in live animals. This would allow breeders to be monitored and subject to periodic and unannounced inspections, with compliance reports accessible online for public review. This approach follows other jurisdictions who have taken similar action, including England & Wales and several European Union member states. As of June 2025, the European Parliament is in active discussion for establishing minimum standards for the breeding, housing and handling of cats and dogs, making it easier for buyers to verify the origin of their future pet and check if rules have been followed.

Other measures we view as important, and currently silent under the PUPS Act, are the creation of strong and detailed minimum standards of animal care which follows the Five Domains of animal welfare and a limit on the overall number of dogs a breeder can house. To ensure enforcement of the Act, our organization encourages the government to allocate additional funding and training resources for inspectors and bylaw officers to help identify and take measures to shut down puppy mills.

The Toronto Humane Society is directly impacted by the oversupply problem of pets in Ontario, and puppy and kitten mill operators are a contributing factor. We welcome an opportunity to provide input to the government, alongside other advocacy groups and stakeholders, on ways to further enhance the PUPS Act and ensure a robust and effective legal framework that regulates breeding and adequately protects animal welfare.

If you suspect someone is running a puppy or kitten mill operation, or that your pet may have originated from such a facility, we recommend reporting to the following agencies –

Animal Welfare Services, responsible for enforcing the PAWS Act, at 1-833-9-ANIMAL

The bylaw officer in charge of animal enforcement and assistance in your municipality. In Toronto, this is Toronto Animal Services, at 311@toronto.ca

Contact your local MPP or the Ministry of the Solicitor General to advise them of your concerns

Recommendations For Sourcing a Companion Animal

We live in a compassionate society where most individuals searching for a pet do not want to contribute to the financial gain of a puppy or kitten mill operator. The decision to bring an animal into your home should be based on thoughtful consideration and informed decisions. While our preference is for individuals to adopt, should someone elect to purchase an animal, we recommend integrating the following considerations to ensure your animal is responsibly sourced.

- The animal is being sold from a classified site or a pet store (unless the pet store is partnering with a local rescue group). These are the most common supply chains for mill operators selling animals.
- The purchase is completed through a third-party broker. Brokers are middlemen dealers that resell animals who are almost always born in a puppy or kitten mill.
- The seller wants to complete the purchase at a location separate from where the animal is living. We encourage individuals to visit where the animal is born and verify first-hand their living conditions.
- The seller has several different breeds of animal or multiple litters for sale at any time. Breeding operations where animals are sold in high volumes often come at the expense of a disregard to the animal's overall health.
- The seller will not allow the purchaser to meet the mother of the puppy or kitten being sold. When purchasing a puppy, a purchaser should ideally walk the mother on a leash or else spend time with her to ensure she is well-socialized and not permanently held in a caged environment.
    - The seller only transacts in cash and is unavailable for follow up support once the sale is completed.
    - The seller does not scrutinize the individual purchasing the animal. Breeders who care for their animals will want to ensure placement to a good home. Ideally, this is documented in a contract between buyer and seller and the breeder is willing to take back the animal in the case of a health condition or if the family is no longer able to provide care.
    - The seller will not provide medical records, including proof of up-to-date vaccinations. Most puppies/kittens of responsible breeders will receive their first exam at 4-6 weeks.

Supporting Resources

- Government of Ontario *Provincial Animal Welfare Services Act, 2019, S.O. 2019, C. 13*, Provincial Animal Welfare Services Act, 2019, S.O. 2019, c. 13 | ontario.ca
- What are the Five Freedoms of Animal Welfare? - Ontario SPCA and Humane Society
- Five Domains Model vs the Five Freedoms of animal welfare
- Dog breeding licence (England) - GOV.UK
- MEPs propose stricter rules on dog and cat welfare and traceability | News | European Parliament
- Mellor, D. 2017. Operational details of the Five Domains Model and its key applications to the assessment and management of animal welfare. Animals (Basel) 2017 Aug 9;7(8):60. doi: 10.3390/ani7080060

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