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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

BBB Alert: Holiday Puppy Scams Target Western Virginia

Roanoke, VA (November 18, 2019) – If you are looking to add a furry four-legged friend to your family this holiday season, be on the lookout for international puppy scams popping up online using local addresses in western Virginia. As more consumers turn to the internet to find new pets, more find themselves falling victim to these canine con artists.

Your Better Business Bureau (BBB) Serving Western Virginia has been alerted by two consumers who went online to purchase puppies at the following websites: MaltesePuppiesHeaven.com, HomeTrainedPugPups.com. Further investigation shows that the registered owner of MaltesePuppiesHeaven.com also holds the JacoTeaCupMaltese.com domain, both located in Johannesburg, South Africa. Maltese Puppies Heaven website uses information and images from other legitimate dog breeder sites. BBB also discovered the Home Trained Pug Pups domain is registered in Denver, Colorado. All three sites are currently active.

According to the Federal Trade Commission, 37,000 people a year fall victim to international scams, paying an average \$100 to \$1,000 for dogs they'll never see. Experts say a shocking 80% of sponsored advertisements about pets may be fake, operating out of West & South Africa.

In the course of a BBB investigation, Home Trained Pug Pups was contacted on November 1, 2019, to address allegations of fraud from a concerned customer. According to the consumer, the money was collected via PayPal, but the animal has never been delivered. The con artist persuades and comforts anxious pet owners to receive their furry friends by listing details of their Pet Safe Travel Program. The pup fraudster plan included the puppy cost of \$650, a delivery fee of \$175, and a pet nanny's charge of \$55, totaling to \$880. The website lists the physical address of a cemetery located in 13002 Callands

Road, Callands, Virginia. The Maltese Puppies Heaven breeder lists a personal residence located in 169 Woodside Drive, Galax, Virginia.

In similar cases, BBB has found that websites selling pets that do not exist will often change names and web locations quickly and frequently, so there is a chance this operation will soon pop up again under a different name. Consumers are urged to always check with BBB before making online purchases to verify the validity of the seller.

From the report provided to BBB, the Missouri consumer lost \$880 to Home Trained Pug Pups. An additional victim of Home Trained Pug Pups puppy scam reported to BBB ScamTracker losing \$1,650.

Based on the cost of puppies listed on the Maltese Puppies Heaven, it's estimated that the second consumer of the scam lost a minimum of \$550. Unfortunately, the victim called BBB after sending money to learn more about the business. The BBB informed her the address didn't match what had been told and that it was most likely a scam.

BBB cautions anyone wishing to purchase a pet via the internet to always check with your BBB before sending money electronically or by gift/pre-paid cards. Referred to as [Puppy Scams](#), this fraud is carried out with all types and all breeds of animals.

If you have been a victim of this scam, share your experience with BBB and others at BBB.org/ScamTracker. If you believe you are a victim of an internet crime, BBB also recommends filing a complaint with the FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center at www.ic3.org and the Federal Trade Commission at www.ftc.gov.

For additional information, check out BBB's [Puppy Scam Study](#) or [download a PDF here](#).

How To Avoid Puppy Scams:

- **Don't buy a pet without seeing it in person.** Do an internet image search for the picture of the pet you are considering. If the same image appears on multiple websites, you may be dealing with a fraud. You also can search for text from ads or testimonials to see if the seller copied it from another site.
- **Never pay a stranger** with a money order, wire through Western Union or MoneyGram, with a gift/pre-paid cards, or through social media apps like Venmo or PayPal (if your debit card is attached to your PayPal account).

- **Always use a credit card** in case you need to dispute the charges.
- **Research prices for the breed you are interested in adopting.** If someone is advertising a purebred dog for free or at a deeply discounted price, you could be dealing with a fraudulent offer.
- **Look for red flags like spelling & grammar errors** on websites and email communication.
- **Verify the sellers' information**, including their name, the business name, address, phone number, etc. Just because the website or an invoice includes this information doesn't mean the information is legitimate.
- **Consider your local animal shelters and Humane Society** instead of shopping online. Many animals are needing good homes locally.

What if you have been a victim of a puppy scam?

- File a report with [BBB's Scam Tracker](#)
- Complain at [Petscams.com](#)
- Complain to the **Federal Trade Commission**. Call **1-877-FTC-HELP**
- **Homeland Security Investigations** at the **Department of Homeland Security** also handles international fraud. Call **866-DHS-2-ICE (866-347-2423)** (*from U.S. and Canada*)
- If you sent money through Western Union, MoneyGram or a Green Dot MoneyPak, contact those companies directly for information about the transactions. They also download their complaints into the FTC's Consumer Sentinel database, which police around the country can access.

Green Dot 800-795-7597

Western Union 1-800-448-1492

MoneyGram 1-800-926-9400

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ABOUT BBB: For more than 100 years, the Better Business Bureau has been helping people find businesses, brands and charities they can trust. In 2018, people turned to BBB more than 173 million times for BBB Business Profiles on nearly 5.4 million businesses and

Charity Reports on 11,000 charities, all available for free at bbb.org. There are local, independent BBBs across the United States, Canada and Mexico, including BBB Serving Western Virginia, which was founded in 1940 and serves 32 counties in Virginia.

For more advice on fighting employment scams, please visit www.bbb.org or contact the BBB Serving Western VA at (540) 342-3455 or (800) 533-5501.

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