

FLORIDA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

BILL ANALYSIS

This bill analysis was prepared by nonpartisan committee staff and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.

BILL #: [CS/HB 1521](#)

TITLE: Handling of Animals

SPONSOR(S): Weinberger

COMPANION BILL: None

LINKED BILLS: None

RELATED BILLS: [CS/SB 1356](#) (Garcia)

Committee References

[Industries & Professional
Activities](#)

17 Y, 0 N, As CS

[Budget](#)

[Commerce](#)

SUMMARY

Effect of the Bill:

The bill requires the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (DACS) to develop and publish on its website a list of voluntary best management practices for dog breeders, recommending the minimum standards of care for the breeding, feeding, housing, health, enrichment, recordkeeping, selling, financing, and transferring of dogs in the state. The bill creates the Dog Awareness and Welfare Guidelines (DAWG) Breeder Program to recognize breeders who voluntarily adopt and implement the best management practices for dog breeders.

The bill modifies provisions governing the sale of cats and dogs in the state. Specifically, the bill imposes additional requirements on pet dealers; extends certain notification timeframes related to the sale of an ill or unfit animal; and clarifies jurisdiction and remedies for disputes over the sale of an animal.

The bill also requires DACS to maintain on its website information relating to animal cruelty and abuse, and instructions on how to report suspected abuse to the appropriate local authority.

Fiscal or Economic Impact:

None.

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ANALYSIS

EFFECT OF THE BILL:

Best Management Practices for Dog Breeders

The bill directs the [Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services \(DACS\)](#) to develop and publish on its website a list of voluntary best management practices for dog breeders. These practices are intended to recommend minimum standards of care related to animal care, facility operations, and breeding practices in the state. However, the bill does not require dog breeders to adopt or comply with the recommended best management practices. (Section [1](#))

Specifically, DACS must develop best management practices addressing the following areas:

- Breeding;
- Feeding;
- Housing;
- Health;
- Enrichment;
- Selling and transferring; and
- Record keeping. (Section [1](#))

STORAGE NAME: h1521.IPA

DATE: 2/9/2026

In addition to the recommended best management practices for dog breeders, the bill requires DACS to develop and publish information for the public on how to identify whether a breeder is adhering to the recommended practices, including a checklist for consumers to use when purchasing a dog. (Section [1](#))

Dog Awareness and Welfare Guidelines (DAWG) Breeder Program

The bill creates the [Dog Awareness and Welfare Guidelines \(DAWG\) Breeder Program](#) to recognize dog breeders who voluntarily adopt and implement the best management practices for breeders. The DAWG Breeder Program is administered by DACS. (Section [2](#))

A dog breeder who voluntarily adopts the best management practices and seeks certification as a DAWG Breeder must:

- Submit an application;
- Voluntarily submit to an inspection by DACS or its designee; and
- Pay the actual cost of such inspection. (Section [2](#))

To conduct the qualifying inspection, DACS may contract with and designate local law enforcement or animal services, or any other public or private entity that regularly conducts animal welfare investigations. Private service providers may include veterinarians who have been licensed for at least ten years and who currently have a Florida license in good standing. If sufficient resources are not available, an applicant to the DAWG Breeder Program may either wait until such resources become available or contract with a private service provider designated and approved by DACS. (Section [2](#))

Upon inspection, if DACS determines that the dog breeder has voluntarily adopted and implemented the best management practices for dog breeding, the department shall issue the breeder a DAWG Breeder Certificate. Once certified, a DAWG Breeder may identify themselves as such in their professional practice, including in marketing and advertising materials. (Section [2](#))

A DAWG Breeder Certificate is valid for two years. However, DACS may suspend or revoke a DAWG Breeder's certification if the department determines that the breeder has failed to maintain the best management practices. (Section [2](#))

Consumer Protections

The bill revises ch. [828.29, F.S.](#), governing the [sale of cats and dogs](#) to strengthen consumer protections and promote animal welfare throughout the state. Specifically, the bill:

- Extends the [return or exchange period](#) for an ill or unfit animal from 14 days to 30 days.
- Extends the timeframe within which a consumer must notify the pet dealer and provide documentation that an animal is unfit following such diagnosis, from two business days to seven days.
- Clarifies that a consumer may seek [reimbursement](#) from a pet dealer for emergency medical services and treatment provided to alleviate the suffering of an ill or unfit animal.
- Expressly prohibits a consumer from returning or exchanging, or otherwise seeking reimbursements, for an animal with a [congenital or hereditary disorder](#), based solely on such disorder, if the pet dealer notified the consumer that the animal had such disorder at the time of the sale.
- Clarifies that [jurisdiction](#) over disputes regarding the return of an ill or unfit animal includes the county court or the small claims court division in the county where the consumer resides.
- Authorizes the consumer to recover up to \$2,500 in punitive damages in a dispute involving the return of an ill or unfit animal. (Section [3](#))

The bill also imposes additional requirements on pet dealers, including that the pet dealer must:

- Disclose all financial terms to the consumer before the sale of an animal.
- Ensure that any pet financing arrangement is terminated without penalty to the consumer when an animal is determined to be unfit for purchase due to illness or disease.
- Retain copies of all records given to the consumer for a minimum of three years. (Section [3](#))

The bill revises the technical and substantive requirements for the [notice](#) that every pet dealer must provide to a consumer at the time of the sale. The notice must:

- Be separate from the sales contract.
- Be printed, in 14-point bold font.
- Be signed by the consumer.
- Specifically inform the consumer of their rights to return the animal, exchange the animal, and receive reimbursement for certain veterinary expenses under certain circumstances.

Further, the pet dealer must retain a signed copy of the notice and give the consumer a copy. (Section [3](#))

The bill amends the definition of “[pet dealer](#)” as used in [s. 828.29, F.S.](#), to exclude not-for-profit entities that offer animals for sale or adoption for a fee that not exceeding \$500, inclusive of all taxes, fees, and other costs. (Section [3](#))

The bill requires DACS to maintain information on its website relating to [animal cruelty and abuse](#), including instructions for reporting suspected abuse to the appropriate local authority. Such information must include a description of conduct that constitutes animal cruelty, the penalties for such conduct, and contact information for at least one appropriate authority in each county in the state. (Section [1](#))

RULEMAKING:

Currently, the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services has the authority to adopt rules as necessary for the execution of its powers and duties.¹ The bill specifies that such authority extends as necessary to create and implement the Dog Awareness and Welfare Guidelines Breeder Program.

Lawmaking is a legislative power; however, the Legislature may delegate a portion of such power to executive branch agencies to create rules that have the force of law. To exercise this delegated power, an agency must have a grant of rulemaking authority and a law to implement.

RELEVANT INFORMATION

SUBJECT OVERVIEW:

[Sale of Domestic Animals](#)

The [Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services \(DACS\)](#) has broad authority to protect consumers and businesses from unfair and unsafe business practices across various market sectors. Additionally, through its Division of Animal Industry, DACS has the authority to regulate and manage the health of domestic animals throughout the state.²

Florida does not currently regulate the breeding of domestic animals.³ However, [s. 828.29, F.S.](#), provides restrictions on the sale of cats and dogs within the state, including requirements related to the animals being sold, the actions of the seller, and the conditions under which sales may occur.

A “[pet dealer](#)” is any person, firm, partnership, corporation, or other association that, in the ordinary course of business, sells more than two litters or 20 dogs or cats per year, whichever is greater, to the public. This includes breeders who sell animals directly to consumers.⁴

¹ [S. 570.07, F.S.](#)

² See Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, *Division of Consumer Services*, <https://www.fdacs.gov/Divisions-Offices/Consumer-Services> (last visited Feb. 1, 2026); and Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, *Animal Industry*, <https://www.fdacs.gov/Divisions-Offices/Animal-Industry> (last visited Feb. 1, 2026).

³ “Domestic animal” includes any equine or bovine animal, goat, sheep, swine, domestic cat, dog, poultry, ostrich, emu, rhea, or other domesticated beast or bird. [S. 585.01\(11\), F.S.](#)

⁴ [S. 828.29\(13\), F.S.](#)

In Florida, all cats and dogs sold, offered for sale, or transported into the state must be at least 8 weeks of age.⁵

Required Medical Treatment and Documentation

Currently, all dogs and cats sold or transported into the state are required to receive tests, vaccines, and antiparasitic treatments under the supervision of a licensed veterinarian at least 14-30 days prior to the animal entering the state.⁶ Animals offered for sale within the state must also be treated before sale, unless a veterinarian certifies that such treatment would not be in the animal's best medical interest.⁷ All dogs and cats sold, or offered for sale, within the state must be accompanied by a current official certificate of veterinary inspection⁸ at all times, detailing all medical treatment that the animal has received. The examining veterinarian must retain a copy of the official certificate of veterinary inspection for at least one year. The seller must provide a copy of the certificate to the buyer, and retain a copy for at least one year following the sale of the animal.⁹

Required Notice

Every pet dealer who sells an animal to a consumer must provide the consumer with a written notice at the time of sale. The notice must read as follows:¹⁰

It is the consumer's right, pursuant to section 828.29, Florida Statutes, to receive a certificate of veterinary inspection with each dog or cat purchased from a pet dealer. Such certificate shall list all vaccines and deworming medications administered to the animal and shall state that the animal has been examined by a Florida-licensed veterinarian who certifies that, to the best of the veterinarian's knowledge, the animal was found to have been healthy at the time of the veterinary examination. In the event that the consumer purchases the animal and finds it to have been unfit for purchase as provided in section 828.29(5), Florida Statutes, the consumer must notify the pet dealer within 2 business days of the veterinarian's determination that the animal was unfit. The consumer has the right to retain, return, or exchange the animal and receive reimbursement for certain related veterinary services rendered to the animal, subject to the right of the dealer to have the animal examined by another veterinarian.

Consumer Protections

Under Florida's Lemon Pet law, consumers who purchase dogs or cats from pet dealers are entitled to specified remedies if the animal is later determined to be unfit for purchase. An animal may be deemed unfit for purchase after sale if:¹¹

- Within 14 days of sale, a veterinarian certifies that the animal was ill, showing signs of contagious or infectious disease, or had internal or external parasites, excluding fleas or ticks.
- Within 1 year of the sale, a veterinarian certifies that the animal has a congenital or hereditary disorder adversely affecting the health of the animal.
- Within 1 year of the sale, the consumer discovers that the pet dealer misrepresented the breed, sex, or health of the animal.

⁵ [S. 828.29\(4\), F.S.](#)

⁶ [S. 828.29\(1\)\(a\) and \(2\)\(a\), F.S.](#)

⁷ [S. 828.29\(1\)\(b\) and \(2\)\(b\), F.S.](#)

⁸ An official certificate of veterinary inspection is a document signed by a veterinarian licensed in the state of origin and accredited by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. It must include the animal's age, sex, breed, color, and health record; the names and addresses of the seller and purchaser; and the examining veterinarian's name and license number. It must also list all vaccines and deworming treatments administered with specificity. The examining veterinarian must certify that, to the best of their knowledge, the animal shows no signs of contagious or infectious disease and no evidence of internal or external parasites, excluding fleas and ticks. [S. 828.29\(3\)\(b\), F.S.](#)

⁹ [S. 828.29\(3\), F.S.](#)

¹⁰ [S. 828.29\(12\), F.S.](#)

¹¹ [S. 828.29\(5\), F.S.](#)

However, an animal may not be deemed unfit for sale based on an injury or illness that occurs after the consumer takes possession of the animal. Further, the presence of intestinal parasites alone does not render an animal unfit, unless the animal is clinically ill as a result of the condition.¹²

Right to Refund or Exchange of Animal

If a dog or cat sold by a pet dealer is determined to be unfit for purchase, the consumer may choose to:

- Return the animal for a refund, including sales tax and reasonable¹³ veterinary costs;¹⁴
- Return the animal for an exchange of equivalent value and receive reimbursement of reasonable veterinary costs;¹⁵ or
- Keep the animal and receive reimbursement for reasonable veterinary costs related to treatment or attempts to cure the animal.¹⁶

However, reimbursement for veterinary costs may not exceed the purchase price the consumer paid for the animal.¹⁷

Congenital or Hereditary Disorders

At the time of purchase, a consumer may sign a waiver relinquishing the right to return a dog or cat due to a congenital or hereditary disorder. If such waiver is signed, the consumer has 48 normal business hours, excluding weekends and holidays, to have the animal examined by a licensed veterinarian of the consumer's choosing. If the veterinarian certifies that, at the time of sale, the dog or cat was unfit for purchase due to congenital or hereditary disorder, the pet dealer must allow the consumer to either:¹⁸

- Return the animal and receive a refund of the purchase price, including sales tax, but not including veterinary costs; or
- Return the animal and receive an exchange of the consumer's choice of equivalent value, with no reimbursement for veterinary costs.

However, if the pet dealer notified the consumer in writing at the time of the sale that the animal had a specific congenital or hereditary disorder, the consumer has no right to any refund or exchange for those disorders.¹⁹

Refund or Exchange Timeline and Notice Requirements

Upon receiving a veterinarian's determination that an animal is unfit for purchase, the consumer must notify the pet dealer within two business days. The written certification of unfitness must be submitted to the pet dealer no more than three business days after the consumer receives it.²⁰

If a consumer that is entitled to return or exchange the animal elects to exercise that right, the pet dealer must provide the refund or exchange within 10 business days after receiving the signed veterinary certification.²¹

Challenged Refund or Exchange

If a pet dealer wishes to contest a consumer's demand for veterinary expenses, a refund, or an exchange, the dealer may require the consumer to produce the animal for examination by a licensed veterinarian of the pet dealer's choice. However, if the consumer and the pet dealer are unable to reach an agreement within ten business days

¹² [S. 828.29\(9\), F.S.](#)

¹³ The cost of veterinary treatment is considered reasonable if it is comparable to the cost charged by other nearby licensed veterinarians for the same services. [S. 828.29\(5\), F.S.](#)

¹⁴ [S. 828.29\(5\)\(a\), F.S.](#)

¹⁵ [S. 828.29\(5\)\(b\), F.S.](#)

¹⁶ [S. 828.29\(5\)\(c\), F.S.](#)

¹⁷ [S. 828.29\(5\), F.S.](#)

¹⁸ [S. 828.29\(6\), F.S.](#)

¹⁹ [S. 828.29\(7\), F.S.](#)

²⁰ [S. 828.29\(8\), F.S.](#)

²¹ *Id.*

after the dealer's receipt of the animal for examination, the consumer may initiate an action in a court of competent jurisdiction to recover or obtain reimbursement of veterinary expenses, a refund, or an exchange.²²

Dog Breeding

Dog breeding refers to the practice of mating selected dogs with the intention of producing puppies that possess particular genetic traits and characteristics. Currently, Florida does not regulate dog breeding, leaving oversight of breeder practices largely unmonitored. However, many other states have established various regulatory frameworks to protect animal welfare, including implementing breeder licensing requirements, mandatory standards for housing and care, and periodic inspections to ensure compliance with animal welfare laws.²³

Beyond regulatory oversight, programs recognizing breeder excellence are becoming increasingly common. These programs reward breeders who adhere to high standards of animal care, health, and ethical breeding practices. For example, in 2013, Purdue University's College of Veterinary Medicine created the Canine Care Certified Standards. This voluntary, nationwide program provides science-based, peer-reviewed guidelines for breeders to ensure the physical and behavioral health of dogs in the care of breeders. The Canine Care Certified program emphasizes five key pillars of care: physical health, behavioral health, environment, breeding life and retirement, and caretaker expectations. Today, 208 breeders across the country are Canine Care Certified.²⁴

Similarly, in 2020, Minnesota launched a statewide breeder excellence program to recognize commercial breeders demonstrating outstanding practices in five categories: behavior and socialization, facility management, health screening, illness specific testing, and continuing education.²⁵

Animal Cruelty

In Florida, animal cruelty includes any act, omission, or neglect that causes unnecessary or unjustifiable pain or suffering to any living animal.²⁶ A person commits the offense of animal cruelty, a first degree misdemeanor, punishable by up to one year in county jail, a fine of not more than \$5,000, or both, if he or she:²⁷

- Unnecessarily overloads, overdrives, torments, mutilates, or kills an animal;
- Deprives an animal of necessary sustenance or shelter;
- Causes any of the above to be done to an animal; or
- Carries an animal in or upon a vehicle, or otherwise, in a cruel or inhumane manner.

A person commits the offense of aggravated animal cruelty, a third degree felony, punishable by up to five years in prison, a fine of not more than \$10,000, or both, by intentionally committing an act on an animal, or failing to act if the person owns and has custody and control of the animal, and such action or omission:²⁸

- Results in the cruel death of the animal;
- The excessive or repeated infliction of unnecessary pain or suffering on the animal; or
- Causes the same to be done to the animal.

A person who is convicted of animal cruelty or aggravated animal cruelty may be prohibited from owning, possessing, keeping, harboring, or having custody or control over any animal for a period of time as determined by a court.²⁹

²² [S. 828.29\(10\), F.S.](#)

²³ See American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, *State Puppy Mill Chart*, <https://www.asPCA.org/sites/default/files/puppy-mill-chart.pdf> (last visited Feb. 1, 2026).

²⁴ Purdue University, College of Veterinary Medicine, *Canine Care Certified*, <https://vet.purdue.edu/ccf/> (last visited Feb. 1, 2026).

²⁵ Minnesota Board of Animal Health, *Breeder Excellence Program*, <https://www.bah.state.mn.us/breeder-excellence> (last visited Feb. 1, 2026).

²⁶ [S. 828.02, F.S.](#)

²⁷ [S. 828.12\(1\), F.S.](#)

²⁸ [S. 828.12\(2\), F.S.](#)

²⁹ [S. 828.12\(6\), F.S.](#)

OTHER RESOURCES:

[Animal Welfare Act and Animal Welfare Regulations](#)

BILL HISTORY

COMMITTEE REFERENCE	ACTION	DATE	STAFF DIRECTOR/ POLICY CHIEF	ANALYSIS PREPARED BY
Industries & Professional Activities Subcommittee	17 Y, 0 N, As CS	2/5/2026	Anstead	Bunnell
THE CHANGES ADOPTED BY THE COMMITTEE:	- Establishes the Dog Awareness and Welfare Guidelines (DAWG) Breeder Program. - Increases consumer protections in pet sales. - Requires the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services to maintain certain information on its website. - Removes provisions related to animal shelters. - Removes provision creating a civil cause of action for consumers. - Removes provision making a violation of s. 828.29 a violation of the Florida Deceptive and Unfair Trade Practices Act.			
Budget Committee				
Commerce Committee				

THIS BILL ANALYSIS HAS BEEN UPDATED TO INCORPORATE ALL OF THE CHANGES DESCRIBED ABOVE.
