



## Position Statements

### **Statement on Black Lives Matter**

We are a humane organization, founded on principles of compassion and empathy, and the elimination of cruelty and suffering. We believe that Black Lives Matter. We acknowledge that people of color suffer under inhumane, insidious, systemic, and overt racism. By failing to consider racial and cultural bias in our past practices, we have contributed in ways small, large, and yet unmeasured to institutionalized racism.

The Humane Society of Western Montana (HSWM) apologizes for the role we have played in preserving practices that fail to acknowledge the dignity of everyone we encounter. We are listening to people of color. We are committed to lasting change.

We believe in creating an environment where Black and Indigenous people and, by extension, all people, have the social, economic, and political power to thrive.\* We are resolved to diversify the voices within our organization, among leadership, employees, volunteers, contributors, customers, and collaborators. We are committed to prioritizing conscientious changes to our practices to ensure no one is marginalized.

We acknowledge that in a predominantly white community and within the predominantly white animal welfare field, we must be relentless and deliberate in the struggle to restore equality and justice.

The damage racism has done to the fabric of our interdependence has made the garment unfit to wear.\*\* We are responsible for reknitting the cloth so that it becomes a banner around which we celebrate our healing rather than the shroud in which we bury our humanity.

\*adapted from Black Lives Matter Global Network "What We Believe". <https://blacklivesmatter.com/what-we-believe/>

\*\*King, Jr., ML. (1963). *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*. Birmingham, Alabama.



## Position Statements

### **Spay/Neuter**

The Humane Society of Western Montana strongly recommends that all companion dogs, cats, and rabbits, except those who are part of a responsible breeding program, be spayed or neutered. Indiscriminate and irresponsible dog, cat, and rabbit breeding leads to millions of unwanted, abandoned and euthanized animals each year in the United States. Spaying and neutering is the most effective way to decrease these numbers, as well as to provide considerable health and behavioral benefits to the animals.

#### ***Operational Policy:***

*All animals available for adoption at the Humane Society will be spayed or neutered prior to adoption unless the treating veterinarian recommends temporarily deferring the procedure for health reasons. The animal will be altered as soon as advised by the treating veterinarian. Unaltered animals can be fostered with potential adopters, however, transfer of guardianship will not be completed until the animal has been spayed or neutered. To prevent the accidental breeding of young cats and dogs, we support pediatric or "early-age" spaying and neutering of animals as soon as they reach two months of age and two pounds in weight.*

### **Pound Seizure**

The Humane Society of Western Montana is opposed to transferring or selling shelter animals (known as Pound Seizure) for use in scientific research or experimentation. It is inhumane to use former pets for these purposes, and it breaks down the public's faith in the animal sheltering system. People who find animals, or who cannot keep their own pets, are less likely to bring those animals to the local shelter if they believe the pets may go to a research or testing facility. The result may well be abandonment of the unwanted pet.

#### ***Operational Policy:***

*The Humane Society does not release animals for the purpose of scientific research under any circumstances.*

### **Breed-Specific Legislation**

The Humane Society of Western Montana opposes any state or local law to regulate or ban dogs based on breed. We recognize that dangerous dogs pose a serious community problem requiring attention. However, scientific data do not support the effectiveness of breed-specific legislation, and these laws unfairly target responsible pet guardians and their dogs.

The Humane Society favors a breed-neutral, community-based approach that includes public education and effective enforcement of animal control laws.



## Position Statements

### **Behavior Evaluations**

The Humane Society of Western Montana (HSWM) recognizes that canine behavior is complex and believes that a holistic evaluation of each pet is the best way to understand behavior. We strive to evaluate each pet individually, giving consideration to the individual's background, threshold for aggression, pain, stress and other factors. We believe it is critical to give due consideration to the fact that the kennel environment is often challenging for even the most well-mannered pets. Accordingly, each pet is evaluated for placement suitability using a combination of tools at specific intervals during a pet's stay in the shelter.

#### ***Operational Policy:***

*A thorough evaluation of all pets is performed upon intake, which includes gathering all known historical behavioral as well as medical information from the person surrendering the pet, regardless of whether the pet is an owner surrender, foster return, or stray. Observations of pet behavior by staff during intake and during daily care, include but are not limited to, overall attitude, resource guarding, attention solicitation or lack thereof, response to handling for physical exam and vaccinations, interactions with the surrenderer and other parties present, presence of signs of acute stress and/or calming signals, and social response to novel staff.*

*Observations are recorded on the pet's intake sheet. Additionally each pet is intentionally evaluated for playgroup/play pal suitability and other appropriate activities such as off-site field trips, sleepovers and leash walks. Activities are assigned to each dog that are best suited to the dog and designed to help reduce stress and promote adoption. If a playgroup is deemed appropriate then as soon as practical under the circumstances, dogs are placed in the playgroup and evaluated for dog-dog interaction behaviors by both staff and volunteers.*

*Dogs will be re-evaluated for appropriate activities and training one week after intake to ensure that deterioration due to kennel stress is limited. If a dog exhibits concerning behavior at any time during the process of evaluation or care, shelter staff should complete the Animal Care Matrix for that individual pet. That pet is then provided a specific training/behavior plan. The animal is then re-evaluated at intervals specified by the HSWM behavior team.*

*HSWM's goal is to provide the best possible care for each animal at the shelter and the best possible outcome for each placement. We believe that the human animal bond is most fulfilling when pets and their people are well matched and all known information is provided to the adopter. All animal care notes are provided with each adopted pet and senior staff, behaviorist, or veterinarian consults are required for pets with special placement needs.*

*Finally, we believe that the human animal bond is not served by placing dogs in our community that pose a risk to human safety or a substantial risk of harm to other pets. We recognize that the HSWM evaluation process and training efforts cannot rehabilitate every pet. Any pet that poses a threat to human safety (including staff) or significant unmanageable threat to other animals will be humanely euthanized.*



## Position Statements

### **Euthanasia**

Euthanasia The Humane Society of Western Montana acknowledges euthanasia of companion animals as an acceptable means of alleviating and preventing suffering. We oppose euthanasia for means of population control or for lack of space. Because overpopulation is the most significant contributing factor leading to euthanasia, we work with the community to provide education and information about responsible pet ownership, preventive medical care, compatible pet selection and affordable spay and neuter and training programs.

Euthanasia shall only be considered for animals with untreatable physical, emotional or behavioral issues after all reasonable options have been explored. These options include:

- Cooperating with other placement facilities
- Foster programs
- Veterinary care
- Behavioral training

Euthanasia should only be performed by skilled professionals who have been trained and certified in administering injectable euthanasia solution. We consider injection by sodium pentobarbital to be the only humane method for euthanasia of companion animals. Premedication should be used to reduce fear and anxiety and eliminate the need for restraint. Euthanasia should not be performed in the presence of live animals. It is essential that the proper steps are taken by trained staff to verify that death has occurred.

### **Cosmetic and Elective Surgery**

The Humane Society of Western Montana opposes elective and cosmetic surgeries and procedures that have no medical benefit and are based solely on the convenience of the animals' owners.

Unacceptable procedures include but are not limited to tail-docking, ear-cropping, and debarking. The Humane Society also opposes declawing, which often results in long-term pain and behavioral problems. Scratching is a normal part of cat behavior, and we believe that declawing cats should only be performed when medically necessary for the cat or the owner and all alternatives have been exhausted. We instead promote the use of scratching posts, nail trimming and Soft Paws and encourage people to seek professional behavioral advice.

#### ***Operational Policy:***

*Humane Society adoption staff will encourage anyone interested in declawing to select a cat that has already been declawed. Adopters expressing their desire to declaw will be given information regarding the procedure itself and alternatives to declawing.*



## Position Statements

### **Training methods**

The Humane Society of Western Montana opposes cruel or harsh training methods. We recognize that training techniques that involve physical and psychological intimidation can hinder effective training and damage relationships between humans and companion animals. The Humane Society opposes training equipment that can cause physical harm or unnecessary distress to the pet.

We believe training is an important component of having companion animals, and pets thrive in an environment that provides them with clear structure and communication. Therefore, the Humane Society advocates for training methods with an emphasis on rewarding desired behaviors and discouraging undesirable behaviors, using clear and consistent instruction.

#### ***Operational Policy:***

*The Humane Society uses only positive training techniques in classes offered at the shelter. Volunteers working with shelter dogs are trained in and required to use positive training methods. Humane Society staff will provide information on reward-based training techniques to people seeking advice.*

### **Puppy Mills**

The Humane Society of Western Montana opposes puppy mills. Puppy mills are defined as commercial facilities that mass-produce puppies for the pet shop industry, Internet sales, or other retail purposes. Puppy mills overlook ill health, genetic defects, and negative behavioral traits in favor of financial profit. Animals suffer in conditions caused by overcrowding, inadequate shelter, poor sanitation, lack of food, water and veterinary care; long-term confinement; and lack of social and behavioral enrichment.

The Humane Society advocates for the adoption of animals from reputable shelters and rescue groups as a first option. We encourage anyone who purchases a pet to seek responsible breeders dedicated to improving the health, condition and behavior of their animals and who assume lifetime accountability for these animals.

The Humane Society extends this position to the commercial mass production of any and all companion animals.



## Position Statements

### **Trapping**

The Humane Society of Western Montana opposes the use of all trapping devices that have the potential to cause pain and suffering of companion animals. Devices such as leg-hold and body-gripping traps cause intense capture stress, grievous injury and death. Traps are inherently non-selective and are capable of capturing any species, including pets.

### **Fireworks**

The Humane Society of Western Montana believes the use of fireworks by individuals in communities where people and pets live together should be illegal. Fireworks displays should be enjoyed only through scheduled professional shows that occur in safe, controlled environments with advance notice to the public for the benefit of concerned pet owners.

While fireworks are an American tradition, their unregulated use in cities and towns causes undue stress to both animals and shelters. Extremely anxious companion animals can bolt from home in search of a safe place and can be injured or killed. This results in a nationwide average of 30 to 60 percent increase in lost pets July 4-6. Only an average of 14 percent of these pets are reunited with their families following the holiday. Animals displaced or disoriented by fireworks may be turned over to local shelters, occupying valuable kennel space, consuming staff time and wasting donated funds and tax dollars.