

Humane Deception

Debunking HSUS's Claim to Support Local Pet Shelters



The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) has come under criticism for its failure to support local pet shelters and local humane societies. A recent report by HumaneWatch, a project of the Center for Consumer Freedom, determined that HSUS gives less than one percent of its annual budget to local groups—totaling \$527,000 over the last three years—despite raising more than \$120 million annually.

In response, HSUS argues that it is unfair to hold it accountable for not supporting pet shelters, because that is not part of its mission. HSUS President Wayne Pacelle writes that HSUS's mission is to tackle “the large-scale cruelties beyond the reach of local humane societies.”

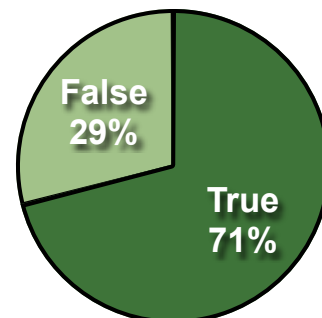
That is an artful dodge. HSUS is fully aware that most Americans believe it is an umbrella organization representing the nation's local hands-on pet shelters. Furthermore, HSUS openly exploits this misperception with advertisements and fundraising materials clearly intended to give the deceptive impression that a significant portion of HSUS's activities support the direct care of homeless pets.

Consider the following:

1. Polling Proof of Misperception

A recent national poll conducted by the Opinion Research Corporation¹ determined that **71 percent of Americans** believe that the “Humane Society of the United States is an umbrella group that represents thousands of local humane societies all across America.” The same poll determined that **68 percent of Americans** believe that HSUS “contributes most of its money to local organizations that care for dogs and cats.” The HSUS refuses to clearly indicate to donors that use of their contributions will not be aligned with donor intent.

True of False: The Humane Society of the United States is an umbrella group that represents thousands of local humane societies all across America.



¹ A survey of 1,008 adults nationwide was conducted by telephone between February 25 and February 28, 2010 by Opinion Research Corporation. The margin of error is plus or minus three percentage points.

2. Failure to Disclose

While HSUS never explicitly says that it financially supports local animal shelters, it also does not obviously disclose the fact that it does *not* fund local shelters. Instead, **HSUS largely allows the clear and proven misperception to stand unaddressed.**

At the same time, **nowhere on HSUS's website donation page or its fundraising material does it explicitly say that HSUS is not associated with local animal shelters.** Even the page titled "Donations F.A.Q." fails to disclose the fact that HSUS has no formal affiliation with local pet shelters. On HSUS's "About Us: Direct Care" webpage, it writes: "The HSUS has stood as the nation's most important advocate for local humane societies."

Astonishingly, on a webpage titled "Have a question?" HSUS dodges its *own* question:

How is The HSUS affiliated with my local humane society?

For more than a half century, The HSUS has stood as the nation's most important advocate for local humane societies. Additionally, The HSUS operates its own network of sanctuaries, providing care and homes to more animals than any other national animal protection organization in the United States.

For example, the Nevada Humane Society (an animal sheltering organization not affiliated with HSUS) attempted to rent HSUS's mailing list for fundraising purposes. As a condition of that use, HSUS required the Nevada Humane Society remove a statement pointing out that it does not receive funding from "national groups" from their materials and any future mailings.

3. Many Local Shelters are Frustrated with HSUS

Recent news stories have quoted a variety of animal shelter professionals responding to HSUS's failure to support local shelters. In a recent interview with News 12 New Jersey, Roseann Trezza, Executive Director of New Jersey's Associated Humane Societies, commented: "**We receive nothing from them. And the amount of money they get nationally and don't share with needy shelters like ours is a shame.**" Amanda Welby from the Seattle Humane Society told Fox Spokane that the misunderstanding between HSUS and local shelters is "**a good source of confusion for a lot of our donors.** [...] We have had issues with people who would intend to name us in their will, but actually name the Humane Society of the United States."

4. Citing Shelter Euthanasia Rates as a Reason to Support HSUS

In its fundraising materials and elsewhere, HSUS references the number of animals euthanized in local animal shelters each year as an important reason to support HSUS.

For instance, a fundraising video featuring actress Jenna Elfman explicitly cites the number of animals euthanized in local animal shelters each year as a primary reason to support HSUS. And in a recent fundraising letter, HSUS President Wayne Pacelle wrote:

“Over 4,000,000 loving pets are put to death each year ... local shelters try their best to save lives, but they are simply overwhelmed and need our help—YOURS AND MINE—TO HELP INCREASE ADOPTIONS.”

But, of course, HSUS does very little to actually help save animals from being euthanized. As any shelter veteran will acknowledge, preventing animals from being euthanized takes money to pay for food and boarding costs. No amount of “support” in the form of magazine subscriptions, training programs, or expensive shelter evaluations (offered by the HSUS for a fee) will keep animals from being put down.

5. **Support HSUS to Support Local Shelters**

In a recent fundraising mailing, HSUS provided a list of the top ten reasons to support HSUS. The top reason read:



Accompanying the list was a picture of a sullen-looking cat.

6. **Deceptive Imagery of Puppies and Kittens**

A recent review of HSUS’s fundraising videos determined that more than 85 percent of all of the animals used in them were either dogs or cats. The same holds true for much of its direct mail and email fundraising documents, which often feature photos of dog or cats inside cages or in animal shelters. In truth, the HSUS spends far more time on meat and egg issues.



7. HSUS Gives Shelters “Assistance”...For a Price

In its defense, HSUS provides a laundry list of things they do to assist local shelters. For instance, HSUS publishes *Animal Sheltering* magazine. They also provide training through Humane Society University, conduct shelter evaluations, and host conferences for shelter professionals.

They make no mention that all of these services come at a cost to shelters. They charge a subscription fee for *Animal Sheltering* magazine. A shelter evaluation reportedly costs up to \$25,000—and that doesn’t cover the cost of implementing the evaluation’s suggested reforms. Humane Society University charges \$1,050 for an undergraduate class and \$1,350 for a graduate-level class. Even HSUS’s Animal Care Expo costs \$250 for registration.

8. Rewriting its Founding Mission

HSUS defends its failure to substantially support local animal shelters, writing on its website that complaints amount to a willful disregard for HSUS’s “founding mission and long history ... This has never been our purpose and never been our claim. Our founders instead sought to attack all kinds of cruelty at its roots, wherever it was occurring.”

HSUS Special Policy Advisor and Assistant Treasurer Bernard Unti recently wrote in *Protecting All Animals: A Fifty-year History of the Humane Society of the United States*:

“The original bylaws of The HSUS provided for its ownership and operation of shelter facilities through established branches conceived as integral units of the parent organization. Such ownership proved to be impractical on several grounds, but it did not prevent The HSUS from becoming **deeply involved with local animal shelters and their problems.** Ultimately, it did so by establishing an affiliates program to forge closer ties to local societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals.”

Unti also noted in *Protecting All Animals* that until the early 1970s when John Hoyt became HSUS’s president, HSUS’s policy was to share most of its revenue with the state-level HSUS affiliates that worked on direct animal care. Unti wrote:

“Under long-standing arrangements, The HSUS designated 60 percent of all funds raised from members within the branch states for use by the chapters, with the national organization taking the rest.”

Wayne Pacelle recently challenged “gullible or sloppy” reporters to “do their homework.” We couldn’t agree more.