



January 2nd, 2020

Kathy Mitchell, Senior Director, Government Affairs
PetSmart
19601 N 27th Ave
Phoenix, AZ 85027-4010

Dear Kathy,

We were disappointed to see this fall that PetSmart doubled the number of Teacher Grants, which include rabbits, for the organization, Pets in the Classroom (www.PetsintheClassroom.org)^{1,2,3}. We welcome the opportunity to discuss this program further with PetSmart.

House Rabbit Society does not recommend rabbits as classroom pets for the following reasons⁴:

1. Rabbits are not inexpensive, low maintenance starter pets.
2. Rabbits are intelligent companions and communicate in very subtle ways. Teachers and students who do not understand rabbit communication, can be boxed with a rabbit's front feet, grunted at, growled at, and/or bitten – these behaviors often worsen over time, as the rabbit becomes behaviorally conditioned through negative interactions to protect themselves in a stressful environment.
3. Rabbits need exercise and mental stimulation (chewing and digging) to maintain best health and disposition. Constantly caged rabbits without appropriate mental stimulation are bored, destructive, withdrawn and cage aggressive.
4. Rabbits are prey animals. They do not like to be picked up, feeling secure with all four feet on the floor. When a child picks up a rabbit and the rabbit struggles, the child can be badly scratched or painfully bitten. The most common injuries for dropped rabbits are spinal fractures and dislocated or fractured legs.
5. Rabbits subjected to stressful situations, such as noise, over-handling, improper foods, diet variations, disruption of daily routine, and temperature variations, are

¹ <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/petsmart-doubles-number-of-teacher-grants-for-pets-in-the-classroom-program-300941351.html>

² <https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20120124005183/en/PetSmart%20AE-Helps-Teachers-Find-Perfect-Pet>

³ <https://www.bizjournals.com/bizwomen/news/latest-news/2019/10/petmart-doubles-funding-for-classroom-pets.html>

⁴ <https://rabbit.org/faq-classroom-rabbits/>

- susceptible to illness. If a rabbit stops eating (a true medical emergency), a typical veterinarian visit and diagnostics bill can reach \$400 or more.
6. Rabbits are crepuscular and are most active at dawn and dusk, and sleep through the middle of the day. This sleeping pattern is disrupted in a classroom environment where they are kept awake by students and classroom activities during the day, disrupting their natural circadian rhythms. This could potentially contribute to a higher risk of illness for the rabbit, or contribute to producing unwanted behaviors, like biting, when the rabbit is regularly being disrupted from sleeping.
 7. Rabbits can die within 12 hours when they stop eating, without veterinary intervention. They cannot be left in a classroom over a weekend or vacation, as it could be fatal.
 8. Spay/neuter of rabbits is essential for responsible pet ownership. Up to 80% of female rabbits will get uterine cancer if not spayed, cutting their life expectancy in half. Unfixed female rabbits are often space protective and will display aggressive hormonal behaviors like biting and boxing that would be unwelcome around children. Males will spray urine if not neutered. Both sexes will use a litterbox after spay/neuter, but without it, will be significantly messier, urinating and defecating everywhere in their space. Pets in the Classroom does not require rabbits acquired through their grants are spayed/neutered, nor do the grants pay for spay/neuter. Rabbit spays can be \$600 or more at a veterinary clinic. If a teacher has an unfixed rabbit in a classroom, it is teaching students irresponsible pet ownership.
 9. Hay and rabbits are common allergens, and may compromise the respiratory health of students with asthma or allergies at school, or force the rabbit to be rehomed.
 10. Our organization and our chapters across the country and internationally have seen many rabbits become unwanted from classrooms due to the reasons listed above, and those rabbits have ended up in shelters or rescues, with classroom pets contributing to the overpopulation of unwanted rabbits.
 11. Pets in the Classroom does not require that rabbits acquired as classroom pets must be adopted from a shelter/rescue organization. Purchasing rabbits from breeders or retail stores selling rabbits is fueling the crisis of overpopulation of unwanted rabbits entering our shelters.

Rabbits live 8-12 years when they are housed indoors, are spayed or neutered, and receive regular rabbit-savvy veterinary care. Rabbits can be a wonderful part of the family, but for the reasons listed above are inappropriate pets in a classroom.

We look forward to your reply.

Best Regards,



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