



# Undercover investigation links New Jersey pet stores to puppy mills

Visits to Midwestern states by the Humane Society of the United States found Horrible Hundred dog breeders and troubling conditions at suppliers of New Jersey pet stores

In the summer of 2024, HSUS investigators with hidden cameras visited four pet stores in New Jersey that sell puppies, followed by 18 commercial dog breeding operations across the Midwest that sold to puppy stores in New Jersey. This operation marks our third exposé of New Jersey pet store sources since 2016 and confirms that stores continue to source dogs from inhumane commercial breeders, otherwise known as puppy mills, despite alleged efforts at reform.

Dogs peer out of rows of dim cages at a facility owned by Raymond Lawson, a breeder in Missouri who has sold dogs to at least three pet stores in New Jersey. Lawson has appeared twice in the Horrible Hundred report of problematic puppy mills issued annually by the Humane Society of the United States. Photo by the HSUS, 2024



## INVESTIGATION METHODOLOGY AND KEY FINDINGS

- We visited four New Jersey pet stores between May and July 2024; many others were studied via shipping records that traced breeders to the stores.
- In August and September 2024, we visited dog breeders in Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Missouri, and Wisconsin.
- Investigators visited 18 breeders / puppy mills that sold dogs to New Jersey stores, often using a hidden video camera or taking photographs from the road.
- Two Horrible Hundred breeders we visited have sold dogs to New Jersey stores in recent years; as we previously reported, at least [nine stores](#) in New Jersey bought from the Horrible Hundred breeders who were in our 2024 [report on problematic puppy mills](#).
- Conditions witnessed at many of the breeders included: dogs attempting to climb out of unsafe cages; dogs exhibiting frantic behavior; enclosures filled with feces; small, raised, wire-floored cages; and dogs with little or no comfort or enrichment objects—all of which are hallmarks of puppy mills.



Dogs at a puppy mill that supplied puppies to a New Jersey store were seen trying to jump out of raised enclosures that had no tops, risking escape and injury. Photo by the HSUS, 2024

## UNDERCOVER AT NEW JERSEY PUPPY SUPPLIERS

The vast majority of dogs sold in pet stores in New Jersey and around the country are born and begin their lives in large commercial dog breeding operations known as puppy mills before they are shipped to pet stores to be sold, often for exorbitant prices. While the federal Animal Welfare Act requires that these breeders be licensed and inspected, standards are minimal, and enforcement of even the most basic rules is lacking.



A boxer puppy at the PetCenter in Old Bridge (owned by Petland) appeared noticeably thin. Photo by the HSUS, 2024



A puppy at the Shake a Paw Greenbrook store appeared frightened or unwell. Photo by the HSUS, 2024

Most of the breeding operations the investigator visited were licensed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, yet many of them had conditions consistent with puppy mills—dog breeding factories where puppies are churned out by the hundreds, and where their parents are confined for life in barren cages, with little attention to their health or welfare.

For example, one breeder we photographed in Missouri, Mahlon Schrock, had dogs in wire cages that were elevated several feet off the ground. Some of his dogs were frantic, and jumping so high that they were able to raise their heads above the cages (photo, Page 2), revealing that the cages had no tops, and the dogs could potentially climb out, or other wild animals could climb in. Animal Welfare Act [regulations](#) require dogs to be securely and safely contained in their enclosures. Despite the obvious safety concern, the USDA has not cited Schrock for any recent violations. Schrock sold dogs to Select a Puppy in Middletown.

Another Missouri breeder, Raymond Lawson, appeared in our [Horrible Hundred](#) report twice, in 2020 and 2024, and has sold dogs to at least three pet stores in New Jersey, including Furrylicious, Puppy Palace and Wayne Puppies. Many dogs at Lawson's facility were seen in long, narrow rows of wood-framed cages, with no room to run and play.

## SECRET SHOPPER VISITS TO NEW JERSEY PET STORES

In contrast to what our investigator documented at the puppy mills, most of the New Jersey pet stores told our undercover shopper, and/or advertised, that they only sell puppies from quality breeders or that their breeders had been personally vetted by pet store representatives. In one store, Furrylicious in Whitehouse Station, our secret shopper was ordered out of the building before they even had a chance to ask about the puppies, begging the question of what puppy stores are trying to hide.

The average cost of a puppy in the New Jersey stores ranged from approximately \$2,000 to \$6,000 each. Some stores add additional costs, such as extra fees and high-interest-rate financing. A sign that our investigator photographed in one of the Shake a Paw stores indicated buyers would be charged even more for a variety of junk fees, such as a “transport and delivery fee” and even a “medical waste fee.” The fees added hundreds of dollars to the already high puppy prices.

A few of the puppies in the stores appeared dirty, frightened or thin, but the truly disturbing conditions were witnessed at the breeding operations—operations the pet stores’ buyers never see.



Signs at the Shake a Paw Greenbrook store indicated that puppies may not be returned for “any reason,” even if they do not get along with other pets in the home, and listed hundreds of dollars in extra fees that would be tacked on to the already-high puppy prices. Photos by the HSUS, 2024

## PUPPY MILL-PET STORE CONNECTIONS

The pet stores we visited were Furrylicious in Whitehouse Station, Pet Center NJ (owned by Petland) in Old Bridge, Shake a Paw in Greenbrook and Shake a Paw in Union. The specific puppy mills we visited were linked to New Jersey stores by a study of interstate shipping documents and by a review of cage cards seen in the stores.

John Goodwin, senior director of our Stop Puppy Mills campaign, said: “The HSUS investigated New Jersey pet stores [in 2016](#) and released additional [research earlier this year](#), making this our third

exposé proving the links between New Jersey pet stores and puppy mills. Once again, we've proven that New Jersey stores have repeatedly failed to ensure that their puppies are coming from humane sources. The pipeline of puppy mills to pet stores is inherently inhumane.”

Sparked by concerns about inhumane puppy sources and [complaints](#) from consumers about sick puppies, lawmakers in about 150 New Jersey communities have already passed [local ordinances](#) against selling puppies in pet stores, showing vast public support for the issue. A statewide bill, The Humane Pet Store Bill, [S.2511/A.4051], would end the sale of puppies in pet stores statewide, adding New Jersey to the list of eight other states, including New York, which have already passed laws to prohibit the sale of puppies in retail stores.

These bills push consumers to more humane sources of pets, such as animal shelters, reputable breed rescues and small, [responsible breeders](#). We are urging the New Jersey legislature to vote on the bill as soon as possible so dogs in puppy mills can be provided relief from their suffering.