

[Commentary](#)

Pet stores selling commercially raised puppies cause a world of hurt



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USDA-licensed breeders can legally confine breeding dogs to stacked, wire cages only six inches larger than their bodies for their entire lives. Photo by Getty Images.

An innocent look. A wag of a tail. It's kind of hard to resist the tug on your heart to buy the dog you see in a pet store window. The problem is that buying a pet shop puppy amounts to a direct investment in the [cruel puppy mill industry](#), which treats parent dogs as breeding machines and puppies as mere products.

Sad to say, [public records](#) show that the puppy mill-to-pet store pipeline is thriving in Minnesota. We've connected puppy stores in the state to puppy mill facilities cited by the United States Department of Agriculture or a state agency for numerous violations of animal welfare laws. There are likely more Minnesota puppy mills cited for violations and involved in-state sales to pet shops, but there are limits to what we can determine since [Minnesota state inspection reports are not made public](#).

Even so, the simple fact that pet shops are sourcing dogs from puppy mills with violations remains disturbing, not least because the bar for legal compliance is so incredibly low. [USDA-licensed breeders](#) can legally confine breeding dogs to stacked, wire cages only six inches larger than their bodies for their entire lives. They can repeatedly and excessively breed dogs without limits, and they can kill dogs they no longer want.

In a disturbing appraisal of federal inspection activities, a new [internal audit by the USDA's Inspector General](#) documented major deficiencies in enforcement. The report stated that the pattern of continued noncompliance with Animal Welfare Act requirements by licensed dog breeders "poses a threat to the well-being and safety of their dogs, leaving them vulnerable to neglect, mistreatment and suffering."

Here in Minnesota, the puppy mill issue got so bad in Winona County that [the County Commission voted to pursue a permanent ban on new breeders.](#)

Luckily, the solution to the puppy store problem is simple. There is a bill in the Legislature ([SF 1943/HF 2627](#)) that would phase out the sale of puppies in pet shops, banning any new stores from selling puppies and holding existing stores accountable for their sourcing of animals.

This legislation tackles puppy mill cruelty, but breeding conditions are just the first stop when it comes to welfare issues in the dismal puppy mill-to-pet shop pipeline. It gets worse. Weeks-old puppies endure grueling and often [filthy transports](#), and they are so likely to be sick they are often [pumped with antibiotics](#), which has led to [antibiotic-resistant infections that have spread to humans](#).

Far too often, too, families [end up with sick puppies](#), steep veterinary bills and heartbreak. They can also fall victim to [predatory lending schemes](#) when they take out a loan to pay the exorbitant price that puppy stores charge — often paying thousands of dollars and high interest rates.

In fact, [several customers have told the Minnesota Senate](#) their story about buying sick dogs from a local puppy store, with some accounts that end with the death of their cherished pets.

In-store conditions are troubling too. Humane World for Animals — formally called the Humane Society of the United States — has conducted [undercover puppy store investigations](#) across the nation and nearly each time we have uncovered awful in-store conditions, sick puppies and connections to puppy mills. [Our most recent investigation](#), released in January 2025, detailed a heartbreaking scene in a Nevada store: In the store's back room, a tiny brown-and-white Havanese puppy was vomiting and lethargic — and left entirely alone to suffer. Staff members failed to take the puppy to a veterinarian, and she later died. This is a common story at pet shops around the country — ailing puppies denied veterinary care and even a measure of human kindness.

The massive animal welfare and consumer protection problems posed by puppy stores have led [eight states and nearly 500 localities, including nine in Minnesota, to ban the sale of puppies in pet shops](#). Our state lawmakers should do the same.

This is a commonsense policy because no Minnesotan needs a pet shop to find the pet of their choice. Shelters, rescues and [responsible breeders](#) who go to great lengths to care for their dogs and only sell puppies directly to consumers will remain great options for pet acquisition. We are lucky to have a wide network of responsible breeders in the region, including 37 breeders who refuse to sell their puppies to pet stores, and have [signed a letter](#) acknowledging that only a puppy mill would do so.

Further, no pet shop needs to sell puppies to be profitable. According to the [American Pet Products Association](#), Americans spent \$147 billion on their pets in 2023, with food, treats and product spending dominating. Pet spending is predicted to have “solid year-over-year growth through 2030.” Similarly, [Morgan Stanley](#) reported the pet industry is “poised to nearly triple to \$275 billion by 2030 thanks to a surge in new owners, favorable demographics and increased per-pet spending.”

Any puppy store owner would be smart to transition away from the sale of puppies and towards a pet products and services model. Many have, including Angel's Pet World in Hudson, Wisconsin, whose owner stated in her testimony to the Minnesota Senate, “some people ask me how that decision impacted my sales... within 2 years, [our customer base grew about 70%](#).”

The bill at the Minnesota Legislature, led by Sens. Scott Dibble, DFL-Minneapolis and Jim Abeler, R-Anoka, and Reps. Matt Norris, DFL-Blaine, and Elliott Engen, R-White Bear Township, is a long overdue, bipartisan animal welfare and consumer protection measure that promises to bring genuine improvements in this area of concern.

This issue is a matter of great public import and goes to the very heart of our duties of mercy and kindness toward animals.

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