

Puppy mill brokers

A puppy mill broker or distributor is a pet dealer engaged in the business of reselling puppies who were bred elsewhere. Unlike retail pet stores, brokers are middleman dealers who obtain puppies from breeders and puppy mills and then transport and resell them. Brokers typically sell puppies to pet stores, but sometimes to research facilities or other dealers, often travelling great distances to do so. In some cases, the term is also used loosely to describe people who resell litters from actual breeders directly to the public—for example, by posing as the original breeder and selling the puppies through websites or classified ads.



PHOTO BY: THE HSUS

Pet brokers or distributors who sell to pet stores or other dealers are required to obtain a Class B dealer license from the United States Department of Agriculture. The Class B license requires brokers to abide by certain minimum standards of humane care and handling. It also requires them to carefully track the sources of their animals. However, many brokers routinely violate these rules. In addition, the health impacts of overcrowding, filthy conditions and lack of basic veterinary oversight at puppy mills are only exacerbated when healthy animals from some breeders are mixed with infectious animals from problem breeders on crowded trucks as they are transported long distances by brokers.

When addressing the accountability of pet stores or examining the sources of their puppies, it is imperative that we understand how most pet store puppies are sourced. The majority are sourced from brokers, not breeders.

Quick facts about puppy brokers:

- An HSUS review of records found that **at least two-thirds of the puppies in pet stores were shipped by brokers, not breeders.**
- Nationwide, there are approximately 764 USDA-licensed pet brokers and 2,907 USDA-licensed breeders.¹
- The use of puppy mill brokers often makes it difficult—if not impossible—for the public to know who a puppy’s breeder was, as many pet stores only disclose broker information—if they provide any information at all. Adding to the confusion is the fact that some brokers use misleading names that imply they are breeders rather than resellers.
- Many Class B dealers are also breeders. Some of the most notorious puppy mills in the country—including Puppies on Wheels in New York Mills, Minnesota; Beaver Creek Kennels in Oberlin, Kansas; and Clearwater Kennel in Cushing, Minnesota—all had B licenses but also had hundreds of breeding dogs. Significant problems at these facilities resulted in Puppies on Wheels owner’s conviction on animal cruelty charges in 2009, the deaths of 1,200 dogs at Beaver Creek’s facility after an outbreak of canine distemper in 2010, and repeated Animal Welfare Act violations at Clearwater Kennel, which appears to be operating under a family member’s name as of 2019.
- HSUS research into the sources of pet store dogs found that a majority of stores were purchasing some or all of their puppies from Pinnacle Pet in Missouri. Others were purchasing from additional brokers, such as Blue Ribbon Puppies (Indiana), Puppy Travelers (Missouri), Tiffanie’s LLC (Missouri) and Choice Puppies (Missouri), formerly known as The Hunte Corporation.
- A review of USDA inspection reports linked to brokers found that a number of brokers have repeat violations of the federal Animal Welfare Act, including violations for sick puppies who were not treated by a vet, overcrowding, undersized cages, unsafe temperatures, the purchase of underage puppies, the purchase of puppies from unlicensed breeders, and unsafe transport vehicles.
 - In December 2016, 53 puppies died in the care of RDR Transport after an unattended truck containing 211 puppies overheated. The USDA report state that the transporter “did not have a thermometer to monitor the temperature of the puppies,” “did not take any of the puppies to a veterinarian” immediately after the incident and “did not speak to a veterinarian about the incident for at least 8 hours after the overheated puppies were discovered.” The USDA did not cancel RDR’s license until three years later.
 - Two large brokers in Missouri—Pinnacle Pets/Sobrad LLC and Batemen Diversified (now known as Puppy Travelers)—were cited by the USDA when nine puppies died after being left on a hot truck in September 2015². Pinnacle was also cited for failing to get proper veterinary care for an ailing puppy in 2018.
- State agencies have also cited brokers (such as Tiffanie’s LLC) for grave animal care violations. For example, in July 2018, Missouri state inspectors received documentation that showed 35 puppies had

¹ USDA, January 2020.

² This report was later removed from the USDA website.

perished at Tiffanie’s, LLC in a six-month period in 2018. At least 13 of those puppies had died of parvovirus, according to state reports.

- In many cases, animals are transported hundreds of miles to pet stores across the country, which raises concerns about the conditions they endure. Several troubling incidents have been reported by the media, including:
 - In February 2018, 24 puppies were seized from one of Puppy Travelers’ transport vans outside a Petland store in Fort Myers, Florida. The puppies were found with “urine, feces and no water” in their cages and many of them were sick, according to news sources and county documents.
 - In February 2017, an Iowa transporter crashed a van carrying dozens of puppies—one of which suffered a broken leg—on a New York highway in the middle of the night.
 - In January 2017, a driver for RDR Transport in Missouri was involved in a box van accident in New York, which put more than 100 puppies at risk, after the driver reportedly lost control of the vehicle. The vehicle hit a ditch and overturned, resulting in at least five puppies needing medical treatment, including one with a fractured jaw and another with a fractured leg, according to news sources.
- Health concerns have also been raised about the puppy broker system, including a few of the following incidents:
 - A USDA-licensed broker in Iowa (Double G Kennels) was confirmed as the source of an outbreak of canine brucellosis in 2019³. Canine brucellosis is highly contagious and incurable. More than 260 dogs from the facility were sold at a dog auction, and multiple dogs tested positive for the disease. According to reports, over 40 buyers across 10 states purchased dogs from the auction, and additional buyers purchased dogs who later tested positive for brucellosis.⁴
 - A USDA-licensed distributor in Indiana (Blue Ribbon Puppies) was linked to an outbreak of drug-resistant disease by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in 2018. The disease, campylobacter, infected more than a hundred people, most of whom contracted it through Petland puppies, and many of whom were hospitalized, according the CDC’s investigation. Despite the connection, many pet stores—including several Petland locations—continue to purchase puppies from Blue Ribbon Puppies.
 - In a September 2018 report on the campylobacter outbreak linked to pet store puppies, the CDC stated that it was difficult to contain the disease because “puppy comingling” by brokers and stores resulted in “a potential for continued transmission of multi-drug-resistant campylobacter nationwide.”⁵
 - The CDC reported another outbreak of drug-resistant campylobacter in December 2019. This outbreak also appears to be closely associated with pet store puppies, most of which come from brokers.⁶

³ <https://iowaagriculture.gov/news/state-veterinarian-confirms-multiple-cases-canine-brucellosis-central-iowa>

⁴ <https://www.desmoinesregister.com/story/news/2019/08/06/iowa-puppy-mill-canine-brucellosis-dog-human-disease-galeazzi-akc-how-to-adopt-dog-double-g-kennels/1937141001/>

⁵ <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/67/wr/mm6737a3.html>

⁶ <https://www.cdc.gov/campylobacter/outbreaks/puppies-12-19/index.html>

- In December 2019, authorities in Nassau County, New York, seized nine puppies from a transporter who was delivering puppies to a pet store from Missouri. The puppies were believed to be infected with campylobacter.

The HSUS recommends that consumers avoid purchasing dogs from puppy brokers or from pet stores due to the many health, safety and humane concerns listed above. The HSUS recommends adopting a dog from a reliable shelter or rescue organization or purchasing from a [responsible breeder](#)⁸ who will show the buyer where the puppy was born and raised. For more information on responsible breeders, see humanesociety.org/breeders.

