

Expanded undercover investigation reveals more sick and dead puppies at Petland stores

Investigators went undercover at six Petland stores between Fall 2018 and Spring 2019

Six different Petland stores often failed to take sick puppies promptly to a veterinarian, and puppies sometimes died without receiving professional veterinary care, our newest Humane Society of the United States undercover investigation reveals.

Undercover investigators recently worked in Petland stores in Sarasota¹, Florida; Novi, Michigan; and Tyler, Texas. We also recently exposed issues at three other Petland stores we investigated, in [Kennesaw, Georgia](#); [Las Vegas](#); and [Fairfax, Virginia](#).

The investigations took place between September 2018 and April 2019. At all six locations, we found sick puppies, with illnesses ranging from seizures to respiratory infections, diarrhea and vomiting. Some of the puppies died inside Petland stores² without ever seeing the inside of a veterinary hospital. And while every store had veterinarians who occasionally visited and “examined” animals, the examinations often lasted only about a minute per puppy.



“Panda,” a shih tzu in the Tyler, Texas Petland, was one of three identical puppies who were immediately put in the isolation area when they arrived at the store. All three became ill. Panda was medicated and force-fed by Petland’s staff in a back room. Our investigator later found her lifeless body in the freezer (photo on page 2). Credit: HSUS, 2018.

¹ As of April 2019, the Sarasota store is in the process of moving to a different address but is still under the same management.

² HSUS found dead puppies in the Kennesaw, Georgia, and Tyler, Texas, store, and law enforcement acting on our tip found a dead puppy and 31 dead rabbits in the Fairfax, Virginia, store.

What follows are some of the key issues our investigators uncovered at the three stores we most recently investigated.

In the Tyler, Texas, Petland store (December 2018):

- A brown Chihuahua named Jade started having seizures and was very ill for five days. Staff reported her issues to the store owner, but she was not taken to a veterinarian for almost a week. After she was finally taken to a veterinarian, staff lamented on hidden camera that the store owner, Samit Darne, should have approved taking Jade to the hospital much sooner. The clearly distressed staff member said the owner rarely took sick puppies to the vet, stating: “He doesn’t want to pay that extra money. So really, most of the dogs that go to the vet end up dying because we take them [at the] last minute.” Jade was euthanized at the veterinary hospital after suffering for days.
- Our undercover investigator found the body of a black and white shih tzu puppy in the freezer. “Panda³” was one of three puppies who had originally appeared healthy, but developed lethargy, lack of appetite and mucoid diarrhea after being put in the isolation (sick) room because there was no room for them in the public part of the store when they arrived. One of the shih tzus was eventually taken to a vet, and one recovered and was put back up for sale, but Panda died.
- Petland staff indicated they regularly provided emergency care to gravely ill puppies in the store, instead of taking them to a veterinary hospital. One staff member described a tiny male Chihuahua whom she said was “crashing.” She said, “it looked like it was dead. It would roll over and its head wouldn’t follow its body and it couldn’t stand up.” When our investigator asked, “What’d you guys do?” the staff member answered, “We gave it saline. We injected it with saline which is liquids basically to see if he responds to it.” She said that the puppy had been placed back in the kennel after he perked up, apparently without visiting a veterinarian for a diagnosis. Staff also admitted to force-feeding puppies who had no appetite, instead of seeking immediate veterinary advice.
- Staff were caught on camera discussing the fact that the store’s veterinarian had reportedly told the store’s owner to stop obtaining tiny puppies under two pounds due to their frailty, but the owner allegedly didn’t comply with the advice. The staff said puppies under two pounds were the most likely to



HSUS’s investigator reported to work in the Tyler, Texas, Petland store, only to find the shih tzu puppy we named Panda dead in the freezer. Panda was one of three shih tzus who arrived at the same time and who had become sick after spending days in isolation. Our investigator reported his concerns to local law enforcement. Credit: HSUS, 2018

³ HSUS staff posthumously named the dog Panda Bear.

get gravely ill, experience seizures and sometimes die. One staff member said three puppies had died since June (a six month period).

- The store received such a large shipment of puppies just before Christmas that staff scrambled to figure out where to put them all. Cages were overcrowded, with some cages that would be suitable for two or three puppies instead crowded with eight or nine puppies. The overcrowding made it even more possible for one sick puppy to infect many others.

Our investigator discussed concerns about the sick and dying puppies with local law enforcement, but to the best of our knowledge, no charges were filed.

In the Sarasota, Florida, store (February and March 2019):

- Puppies were frequently sick, exhibiting explosive diarrhea, vomiting or respiratory problems. But instead of being taken to a veterinarian immediately, they were sometimes treated in the store without professional veterinary testing or diagnosis. On one day, the store had 70 puppies and approximately 28 of them were sick.

- In February 2019, two customers came into the store to say that a husky they had recently purchased had canine parvovirus, a highly contagious disease that can be deadly in puppies. Staff were pressured to clean frantically as soon as the illness was reported, but the store didn't reveal the possible contamination to the public, and continued to sell puppies that they knew may have been exposed to the deadly disease. As time went on, computer records viewed in the store indicated that up to seven puppies at a time were isolated on "parvo watch" but customers were not informed.



Overcrowding in the Sarasota, Florida, Petland store. Credit: HSUS, 2019.

- The sales staff were under pressure to sell as many puppies as possible with little regard for whether the puppies were healthy or the families were choosing a suitable pet. Financial incentives for selling the expensive puppies could earn "pet counselors" \$100 or more for each puppy they sold. About a week after top managers were notified that puppies in the store may have been exposed to parvovirus, a supervising Petland manager visited the store and gave sales staff a weekend sales goal of \$60,000. This put pressure on the employees to sell as many puppies as possible, as quickly as possible, even if they had recently been ill.
- Puppies who were sick and who had "red tags" on their cages indicating a possible contagious illness were sometimes still removed from their enclosures to be handled by potential buyers, as employees were pressured to meet sales goals and earn commissions.

- Our undercover employee saw a dead hamster who had been left in a drawer in the back room. As a male employee placed the hamster in the store’s freezer, our investigator tried to get a better look at the other bundles in the freezer, asking what else was in there. The male employee informed her, “We don’t mess with the freezer for good reasons,” and slammed the door shut.

In the Novi, Michigan, store (late March and early April 2019):

- Customers regularly called the store with complaints about sick puppies they had purchased. On one occasion, our investigator watched Petland employees talking to three people who called in about sick puppies during a single shift.



A sick golden retriever in the Michigan Petland store was lethargic and had a runny nose, yet was still up for sale. Our investigator regularly overheard Petland employees talking to buyers who called to complain about sick puppies. Credit: HSUS, 2019

- In the back room, puppies were often treated for issues such as persistent diarrhea, nasal discharge and other respiratory problems. Several sick animals were given medications at the discretion of staff members or managers, instead of being taken promptly to a veterinarian for a clinical diagnosis.
- When their symptoms improved, sick animals were sold, and it wasn’t always clear whether the “pet counselors” notified buyers that their puppies had recently been sick or had been exposed to other sick animals.⁴
- A staff member admitted to our undercover investigator that she had contracted *Campylobacter* (a drug-resistant strain of the disease was recently linked to Petland puppies during a Centers for Disease Control investigation) and had been hospitalized for four days. The store was [recently sued](#) for the third time in recent years after a customer who purchased a puppy in the store became similarly ill with *Campylobacter*; he too was hospitalized. The puppy buyer incurred “weeks’ worth of medical expenses,” according to [news sources](#).
- A store employee stated on camera that all the puppies in the store are routinely dosed with antibiotics, apparently as a preventative measure. The fact that an antibiotic-resistant strain of *Campylobacter* has been linked to the store and that puppies with diarrhea and other symptoms still weren’t being routinely tested for the disease is cause for concern.

⁴The Novi store was [sued](#) in 2018 by dozens of puppy buyers who claimed they were sold sick puppies, and it appears that similar complaints are still a regular issue.

- At a March 2019 mandatory meeting for all staff, the store’s owner, Randy Horowitz, suggested that a new arbitration clause in their purchase contracts would discourage consumers with sick puppies from filing future lawsuits. Because the clause requires arbitration with the American Arbitration Association (an independent non-governmental tribunal), Mr. Horowitz stated, “they can’t take us to court. They can’t sue us or anything.”



The HSUS investigated six Petland stores altogether between fall 2018 and spring 2019. This report is the third installment of a series, documenting issues at three new stores. The first part of our investigation, released in December 2018, revealed numerous sick puppies and a dead puppy in the freezer at the Kennesaw, Georgia, Petland, as well as a sick puppy in the Las Vegas store who was kept in a back room for weeks before being shipped back to his broker and an uncertain fate, even though our investigator offered to give him a home. This flies in the face of Petland’s claim on its website that “every puppy finds a home” at Petland. The second part of our investigation covered the [Fairfax, Virginia](#), Petland store. Released in April 2019, the Fairfax investigation found sick puppies as well as a high death rate in the store’s rabbits. Our investigator found and documented more than a dozen dead rabbits in the freezer. After local law enforcement investigated our complaint, they found 31 rabbits and a dead puppy in the freezer. Petland severed its relationship with the Fairfax franchise after we released our footage, and as a result, the Fairfax location quickly [closed](#) down.

Above: a tearful manager in the Tyler, Texas, Petland tried to provide care for a Chihuahua named Jade who had multiple seizures over a five day period. Below: Jade resting in her cage in the back room. By the time the store owner allowed Jade to be taken to a veterinary hospital, she was too sick to save. She was euthanized. Credit: HSUS, 2018



Handling of sick puppies not in line with Petland's claims

Petland, Inc. is an international chain of puppy-selling pet stores with approximately 80 locations in the United States, most of which sell puppies. Most of Petland's stores are independent franchises, but they all operate under Petland's rules and guidelines. Petland's website claims that it is the "retail pet industry leader in the area of animal care," but our investigation found that most of the treatments for Petland's sick puppies were doled out in the store by staff with no professional veterinary training. Ailing puppies sometimes were not taken to a veterinarian until they had been miserably ill for days on end and appeared likely to die, especially at the Texas location.

Most Petland stores receive puppies from massive out-of-state resellers, also called brokers or distributors, located in top puppy mill states such as Indiana, Iowa, Missouri and Ohio. Our [December investigation](#) revealed that many Petland stores were still buying from Blue Ribbon Puppies in Indiana, owned by Levi Graber. Blue Ribbon Puppies was one of the suppliers linked to the drug-resistant *Campylobacter* outbreak that made [118 people](#) sick between 2016 and 2018, according to public records the HSUS obtained from the Centers for Disease Control and the Indiana Department of Health.

Symptoms of *Campylobacter* infection, according to the [CDC](#), include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea that could contain blood, and abdominal pain. The outbreak studied by the CDC and linked to Petland was an especially dangerous, multi-drug resistant strain which put many people in the hospital. In a 2017 [press release](#) published at the start of the outbreak, after the first 39 victims had been identified, Petland claimed it was already following all of the CDC's recommendations for containing the outbreak, and stated that the illnesses were a result of "dog fecal matter (poop) being placed in the human's mouth," implying that the victims were at fault for poor hygiene. But Petland's press release failed to mention that this particular strain of *Campylobacter* was a multi-antibiotic resistant strain. Instead, Petland's statement implied the infection was a routine problem, stating that "any puppy or dog" could carry *Campylobacter* germs, without distinguishing between the more typical infections and the drug-resistant strain linked to Petland puppies. Petland's press release also implied, without citing evidence, that some of the victims may have been infected by eating chicken instead of by handling Petland puppies – a claim that is not in line with the CDC's conclusions.

Even though diarrhea is a symptom of *Campylobacter* infection, parvovirus, and other serious and potentially deadly diseases that infect puppies, the Petland stores we visited appeared to take a cost-cutting approach to dealing with it. When puppies at some of the Petland stores we visited lost their appetite or had bloody or mucoid diarrhea, they were typically treated on an ad hoc basis by non-veterinary staff. More than once, our investigators were told to wash away bloody or mucoid diarrhea, and then witnessed store supervisors directing medication protocols for the puppies – rather than sending the puppy or the stool sample to a veterinarian. This kind of non-professional care could lead to new outbreaks of *Campylobacter* or other significant diseases, putting store employees, customers and their human and animal families at risk.

An April 2019 proposed class action lawsuit alleges that a former Petland Mall of Georgia employee, a minor, contracted an antibiotic-resistant strain of *Campylobacter* at the store, which resulted in her spending four days in a children's hospital and suffering lasting health effects. According to the complaint, Petland falsely represented that their puppies were healthy, concealed symptoms of *Campylobacter* and risk to humans, and failed to prevent sick puppies from coming into contact with employees and the public, at great risk to their

health. The complaint alleges that Petland and its franchisees “have sold thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of contaminated puppies during the class periods.”⁵

Petland buys from problem puppy dealers, including some we exposed in our “Horrible Hundred” reports

Records the HSUS obtained from the Georgia Department of Agriculture in early 2019 indicate that despite having knowledge that Blue Ribbon Puppies was linked to the drug-resistant strain of *Campylobacter* that allegedly infected some of their puppies, as well as some of their employees and customers, some Petland stores continued to buy puppies from Blue Ribbon. And according to state inspection records, the Kennesaw Petland store received at least two puppies from Blue Ribbon who came down with canine distemper in March 2019. One of them, a golden retriever named Ruby, died. The second puppy, a husky named Bear, was still being treated in the new owner’s home at the time of the state’s inspection. The Kennesaw Petland sold at least six other puppies who had come into contact with the puppies who had distemper, according to the state’s report, and it appeared Petland had not notified those buyers immediately that their puppy may have been exposed to the disease.

Blue Ribbon Puppies is not the only problem dealer that has sold hundreds of puppies to Petland stores, according to documents reviewed by HSUS. At least ten different Petland stores recently purchased puppies from a Frankford, Missouri, dealer, Tiffanie’s LLC (Tiffanie Kurz), where, according to Missouri state records, at least 35 puppies recently died. Both Blue Ribbon Puppies and Tiffanie’s, LLC were listed in the HSUS’s 2019 [Horrible Hundred](#) report.

As we revealed in the May 2019 Horrible Hundred report, Tiffanie’s LLC, a USDA⁶-licensed broker (distributor), was the subject of a state investigation in June and July 2018 which revealed that 35 puppies had died

over a six month period⁷. Some of the puppies died of deadly parvovirus without being taken to a veterinarian, the state’s investigation found. The report noted: “The acquisition/disposition records acquired from Tiffanie’s LLC, with acquisitions starting January 1, 2018 until June 25, 2018 were reviewed. During this time period there were thirty-five puppies that were recorded as having died since being acquired by the licensee.” The state’s



Above: An “AKC inspected” sign in the Sarasota Petland store gives buyers a false impression that the American Kennel Club oversees the health and quality of Petland’s puppies. The AKC is not an animal welfare group and has no law enforcement powers. Credit: HSUS, 2019

⁵ Dawn Singleton v. Petland Mall of Georgia et. al., U.S. District Court, Northern District of Georgia, Atlanta Division [case number 1:19-cv-01477, filed April 2, 2019].

⁶ The United States Department of Agriculture is in charge of enforcing the Animal Welfare Act at operations that sell animals to pet stores.

⁷ According to records HSUS obtained from the Missouri Department of Agriculture.

investigation also found that former employees had complained puppies were neglected at Tiffanie's LLC when they needed medical care, and it investigated a claim that puppies were shot in front of employees. The state was never able to substantiate the latter claim, but it did substantiate the high rate of death and disease in Tiffanie's LLC's puppies.

If dozens of puppies died on Tiffanie's LLC's property, it's likely that more puppies got sick or died after leaving the property and arriving at Petland stores; parvovirus is highly contagious and can incubate without symptoms for up to two weeks, according to the [Merck Veterinary Manual](#). Each sick puppy could have made puppies from other breeders and distributors sick along the way, or after arriving in the store. And because broker trucks often drop puppies at many different pet stores along their route, numerous pet stores could be infected by a single transport.

All of the troubling information we found about Tiffanie's LLC was readily available through state public records requests, but some Petland stores continued to buy from the dealer many months after the state found out about the high death rate in its puppies. During a recent one-month period (March 1 to April 1, 2019), at least ten different Petland stores purchased from Tiffanie's, LLC: the Petlands in Bradenton, FL; Chicago Ridge, IL; Henderson, NV; Knoxville, TN; Naperville, IL; Orlando East, FL; Pittsburgh (Robinson), PA; Rockford, IL; Tyler, TX; and Janesville, WI.⁸

Additional records the HSUS obtained via public records requests show that Tiffanie's LLC purchased some of its puppies from breeder Pam Baldwin, whose kennel, Samples Creek Kennel, had year after year of animal welfare violations, including more than [126 violations](#) over a two year period, before finally closing down after Missouri's Attorney General's office sued it in 2018 for [violating state laws](#). Baldwin's kennel appeared repeatedly in the HSUS's [Horrible Hundred](#) reports after state and federal inspectors found dozens of sick and ailing dogs on her property.

HSUS researchers and investigators found several more dealers who have been in our [Horrible Hundred report\(s\)](#) selling to Petland stores in 2018 and 2019. For example, documents our investigator reviewed in the Tyler, Texas, store indicated it purchased puppies not only from Tiffanie's LLC, but from Anita Gustin (2015 and 2016 Horrible Hundred), Puppy Travelers, Inc. (2018 Horrible Hundred) and J.A.K.'s Puppies (2019 Horrible Hundred).

Many Petland stores, including the Fairfax, Kennesaw, Novi and Sarasota franchises, also purchased from a network of distributors in Fresno, Ohio, that have operated under an array of frequently-changing names, including Homes for Canines and Twin Creek Kennels. Twin Creek and Homes for Canines were named in a lawsuit for allegedly providing the puppy to the Novi store who was infected with *Campylobacter* and passed it on to his new owner, according to that lawsuit.

The conditions puppies endure during their long journeys to Petland stores are another concern. Last year, two dozen puppies were seized from a truck that was about to deliver them to the South Fort Myers, Florida, Petland, according to [news sources](#). Authorities were there to investigate consumer reports about sick puppies who had died shortly after purchase, according to the reports. The puppies had been trucked from Missouri to Florida in cramped, filthy conditions and some did not have water, according to the news sources. HSUS researchers found that the shipment came from Puppy Travelers, Inc, in Neosho, Missouri.

⁸ The information linking Tiffanie's LLC to Petland was found on public transport records the HSUS obtained from Missouri.

Puppy Travelers shares space with Pinnacle Pet, LLC, another broker that sells large numbers of puppies to Petland stores. Pinnacle Pet was cited by the United States Department of Agriculture in 2015 when eight puppies died in a hot vehicle that had been left unattended.

Petland claims that it purchases only from breeders and distributors with no recent USDA violations, but clearly its checks and balances are grossly insufficient. Reports from [news agencies](#) and animal welfare [watchdogs](#) indicate that USDA is failing to live up to its enforcement obligations. For example, our most recent [Horrible Hundred](#) report shows USDA failed to cite some dealers, such as Tiffanie’s LLC, for any recent violations, even when state inspectors found numerous ill, underweight or injured dogs at the same properties and during the same general time period. Petland is clearly not checking state records on dog breeders or removing distributors from its supply chain even when some of them, like Blue Ribbon Puppies and Homes for Canines, have been linked to issues like the Campylobacter disease outbreak. Given the history of many of Petland’s suppliers, it’s not a surprise that many puppies arrive at Petland in poor condition or quickly become ill after arrival.

Promises and “warranties” protect the store, not the buyer

The HSUS has received more than 1,300 complaints about sick Petland puppies since 2006, and our [2008 investigation](#) linked the pet store chain to inhumane puppy mills. Since then, consumers have repeatedly sued Petland for allegedly selling sick or genetically defective puppies and misleading buyers.

In addition to the November 2018 lawsuit against the Novi store, a 2017 [lawsuit](#) accused the Kennesaw, Georgia, store of selling sick puppies. It was dismissed from federal court, but that decision to dismiss is being appealed, and a complaint could still be filed in state court for state law-based claims. Petland had to pay [more than \\$12,000](#) in veterinary bills for one of the sick dogs the Georgia store sold, according to news sources.

Our undercover investigation revealed several factors that could be to blame for the seemingly large number of sick puppies sold by Petland stores. Some came from distributors with troubling backgrounds. Others were exposed to sick animals in the store. And Petland’s “pet counselors” were sometimes under pressure to sell as many puppies as possible, both to maintain their sales jobs and to pad their small paychecks. Since some buyers are specific about the type of breed they want, pet counselors eager to make a sale could be under pressure to sell a specific puppy even if the animal was starting to show signs of illness.

Time and again, our investigators saw Petland selling puppies who had recently been exposed to other sick animals, had recently come out of isolation for illness, or who themselves had recently shown signs of illness, sometimes without disclosing the full details of their health histories to buyers. Petland’s “pet counselors” were financially compensated for selling more puppies, and thus had little incentive to warn consumers that a puppy might have problems.

Customers who purchased sick puppies told HSUS they were often dismayed to find out that they were stuck with expensive veterinary bills and that often Petland’s “health warranties” were worth very little. Some of them were also persuaded to finance their puppies at alarmingly [high interest rates](#) – sometimes at almost 30% annual percentage rates.

Petland’s warranties are often used as a selling point for customers, making them feel safe about buying a puppy who is “guaranteed” to be healthy, or at least replaceable. But Petland’s warranties are riddled with language that protects the store, not the buyer. For example a “Limited Lifetime Puppy Warranty” offered by the Novi store, and many other Petland stores, promises to replace the puppy if he or she dies —but only if the buyer

continues to purchase a specific brand of dog food directly from the Petland store, as well as special vitamins, and at least \$30 worth of pet supplies every month—an estimated cost of over \$500 per year, for the life of the dog. The warranty only guarantees the store a repeat customer, not a healthy dog. The warranty also requires the owner to produce a necropsy report documenting the cause of their dog’s death, an additional hefty expense that most pet owners would not normally incur.

Petland’s limitation of liability also severely restricts the expenses a Petland store will cover after selling a customer a sick puppy. For example, Petland will not pay for any diagnostic tests incurred by buyers, according to the Michigan contract we reviewed. Some Petland stores will only cover medical bills for dogs if the buyer uses a specific veterinarian⁹.

Some buyers who contacted HSUS said they felt duped into buying very expensive puppies they thought were from high quality breeders, only to find out later that they came from puppy mills. A buyer who contacted the HSUS in April 2019 said he purchased a puppy from a Kentucky Petland store after being told the dog was from a high quality breeder, only to find out later that the breeder, Milton Lewis of Newport, Nebraska, was in the HSUS’s [2018 Horrible Hundred](#) report due to horrific state animal care violations. Lewis’s state violations included a dog with puncture wounds, a puppy who had his leg ripped off by another dog, a limping dog and filthy conditions. The breeder also admitted to the state inspector that he had 14 unwanted puppies and dogs euthanized for convenience reasons such as “lack of buyer interest,” even though he was made aware that rescue options were available. But the Petland puppy’s buyer was not given any information about the state violations; he only received copies of the breeder’s recent USDA reports, which didn’t list any citations. The buyer said he was dismayed to find out that he had paid approximately \$8,000 for a puppy who was from a puppy mill (\$6,000 plus financing interest).

Despite customer reliance on American Kennel Club certification, AKC demonstrated it is part of the problem, too. Many Petland stores prominently display “AKC inspected” signs, which could falsely mislead the public into thinking the AKC is overseeing the quality of puppy care at pet stores. Our investigator witnessed an AKC inspector visiting the Tyler, Texas, store briefly, and it appears he only looked at paperwork on a few dogs. He was only in the store for about an hour.

Contrary to the perception many shoppers may have, the AKC is neither an animal welfare group nor an enforcement agency. Its partnership with Petland seems tied to the additional registration fees it collects from thousands of AKC puppies that Petland stores sell annually. In fact, the [AKC regularly fights](#) against proposed laws that would require better care standards or regular inspections of breeders, and its partnership with Petland has only served to lull potential puppy buyers into a false sense of security about the health and quality of their animal.

Scandals at Petland stores

Too often, Petland makes excuses for poor animal care at its stores. In fact, its first reaction to our April 2019 exposé of the Fairfax store—which documented [a freezer full of dead rabbits](#) and revealed that an unlicensed rabbit mill was the store’s primary supplier—was to insinuate that our investigator had something to do with the rabbits’ deaths. This spurious allegation was quickly disproven when the [local police announced](#) that they had

⁹ Some states have laws that restrict pet sellers from requiring puppy buyers to use specific veterinarians.

seized a total of 31 dead rabbits and a dead puppy from Fairfax Petland’s freezer—months after our investigator stopped working there.

Petland made the right decision when it swiftly ended its association with the Fairfax store, just a day after our report exposed the animal deaths. But Petland should already have been overseeing quality and compliance with its purportedly high standards; the Fairfax store had been the subject of [complaints](#) for years. Only when those heinous violations were made public nationwide did Petland pull its support. Petland also revoked its association with an Ohio store in 2009 after one of its employees was accused, and later convicted, of animal cruelty for [drowning two rabbits](#) at the store – but again, only after the case received widespread attention.

A Lakeland, Florida, Petland store also shut down in 2015 after its owner [was arrested](#) for forging puppies’ veterinary documents. A South Austin, Texas, Petland store [closed down in 2010 after it was fined](#) approximately \$30,000 for failing to comply with a local ordinance requiring puppies to be spayed or neutered before sale. The Sarasota store we investigated was also accused of breaking local laws when it continued to sell puppies in violation of a county ordinance banning puppy sales in pet stores. In April 2019, the store [settled with Sarasota County](#) and, at the time of this publication, was in the process of moving just outside county limits, presumably to escape the ordinance. This shows the ordinances are effective, and that we need more localities to pass them.

In November 2017, the Henderson, Nevada, Petland [was fined thousands of dollars for 19 violations](#) for issues such as “cramped cages, failing to provide medical records and failing to isolate a sick dog” from the rest of the dogs.

The public has done its part by blowing the whistle. Several Petland stores have been accused of offering noticeably [underweight puppies](#) for sale after shoppers took photos of puppies who didn’t look healthy and posted the pictures on social media. Shoppers documented thin puppies in the [Pittsburgh](#) store in 2019, the [Fairfax](#), Virginia store in 2017, and the [Henderson](#), Nevada, Petland store in 2016.

Conclusion

Our undercover footage shows that sick puppies are part of the day-to-day reality in more than just a few of Petland’s stores. In fact, the very business model that Petland is founded on is part of the problem; every year thousands of puppies who have already been given an unhealthy start at puppy mills are shipped from distant states on large trucks, further exposing them to stress and disease along the way, worsening any issues that may have been present at the loosely-regulated breeding establishments where they were born.

The entire mass-market puppy supply chain is so problematic, and complaints about sick puppies sold by pet stores are so common, that more and more states and localities are taking action by banning the sale of puppies in pet stores altogether. Two states, California and Maryland, recently banned the sale of commercially-raised puppies in pet stores, and several states, including Maine, New York, Pennsylvania and Rhode Island are considering similar laws. Comparable laws have already passed in more than [300 localities](#), including cities, towns and counties. But instead of seeing the writing on the wall and moving toward a humane model that offers pet supplies only, Petland has moved to impede localities from passing such laws by urging state lawmakers to pass “pre-emption” laws, which would limit the rights of localities to prohibit the sale of puppy mill puppies in pet stores.

Petland not only supports and engages in low-cost inhumane animal care, but it protects these callous practices by engaging in consumer intimidation. We have received complaints from former Petland employees as well as

puppy buyers who felt they were made to sign intimidating legal documents that restricted what they could say about their experience at Petland—an indication that Petland is trying to silence critics rather than work on solving its internal and systemic problems.

Consumers can protect themselves by refusing to support inhumane businesses. The Humane Society of the United States urges consumers never to buy a puppy from a pet store, because puppies in pet stores are often sick, and many of them come from inhumane dealers known as puppy mills. [Responsible breeders](#) don't sell to pet stores or online, because they don't sell to middleman or people they haven't met. They want to meet the families who are taking home their puppies and stay in touch in case of any problems.

We recommend visiting an animal shelter or reputable rescue group as the most humane option when getting a new pet. At shelters and responsible rescue centers, healthy, vaccinated puppies, dogs, cats and other pets are available for relatively low adoption fees, and most of them are already spayed or neutered. Shelter workers, unlike pet store sales clerks, don't receive a kickback for convincing someone to take home a pet.

If a family doesn't find the right kind of dog for them at their local shelters, they should work only with a breeder they have met in person and carefully screened. For more information on how to get a puppy from a responsible source, see www.humanesociety.org/puppy.

Find out more information visit humanesociety.org