

# **Concerning Conditions at New Jersey Pet Stores**



**A new Lady Freethinker (LFT) investigative report into New Jersey pet shops reveals widespread neglect to puppies and dogs.**

# INTRODUCTION

Puppies covered in urine, cowering in corners of barren display windows or small cages, and showing symptoms including bloody stools and quivering that led one vet to voice concerns that they could be “medically ill” and possibly contagious – those are just some of the conditions uncovered by a Lady Freethinker (LFT) investigator who visited 14 pet stores in New Jersey.



Six states and more than [400 municipalities](#), recognizing that many pet stores source their puppies from large-scale operations and sub-optimal animal welfare conditions, have now banned the retail sales of dogs and puppies from commercial breeders in pet stores.

But New Jersey continues to rely on its [Pet Purchase Protection Law](#), which requires pet stores to post information about their commercial suppliers and also provides some recourse for customers who buy sick puppies.



While the law aims to protect both people and puppies, LFT's investigator had concerns about whether puppies were receiving adequate care and whether pet stores were being transparent with possible purchasers about where they get their puppies.

**The investigator went undercover and visited pet stores owned by 14 different operators in October–November 2022 and January 2023 and found puppies in unsanitary conditions and others who likely were suffering from inadequately treated health conditions, according to a veterinary expert who spoke with LFT.**

The investigator also probed several pet stores' claims that dogs came from small-scale "farms," with fewer than 100 dogs, by driving to dozens of locations listed on breeders' federal licenses across two states.

That reconnaissance, along with public inspection records pulled from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (or the USDA, which licenses and oversees breeders who sell to pet stores), revealed dogs instead being bred and raised at large-scale operations – which, for the purposes of this report, LFT defines as any facility that has more than 100 dogs at any given time.





An LFT analysis revealed that, despite employees' claims to the contrary, 56 breeders and dealers with posted USDA license numbers had more than 100 dogs at the time of their last inspection — or 39 percent of the suppliers.

**"Most of these dogs are being sold anywhere from \$2,000 to \$6,500, and yet they're coming from places that are either large-scale breeding facilities, some that are hidden from public view by privacy fencing around the kennels and others that are on properties with trash all over them," the investigator said after surveilling the facilities whose licensing information was posted in the pet stores.**





Those facilities spanned 10 states, with the closest facility 424 miles away from the pet store stocking its dogs and puppies — for an estimated transport time of 7 hours and 12 minutes, according to Google Maps.

Meanwhile, the farthest facility from the pet store reportedly stocking its puppies was 1,540 miles away — for an estimated transport time of nearly 23 hours, according to Google Maps.

**"The stores get away with painting this perfect picture to customers that the puppies are running in fields of green grass," the investigator continued.**

The investigator told LFT the observed pet store conditions confirmed initial concerns.

"The suffering for dogs in pet stores starts from the moment they are born until the time that they are purchased," the investigator said. "The puppies are coming from large-scale breeding operations, with some breeders totaling more than 300 dogs at their kennels. Then, while in the stores, they are sleeping on wired flooring, kennels are very small, and there's a lack of enrichment, socialization, and very little to no exercise."

**"Your best bet is to visit a local animal shelter and adopt a companion animal who is in need of a loving home, as millions of dogs and cats enter shelters each year."**





**Lady Freethinker hopes this report will equip change-makers and legislators with the in-depth information they need to advocate for a more compassionate future for puppies being sold in New Jersey pet stores — including legislation that would prohibit pet store sales of commercially-bred dogs. We also hope the report emphasizes the importance of adopting — and not shopping for — companion animals.**

Lady Freethinker has alerted authorities about the observed conditions and is not publicly naming the visited pet stores in this report so as not to jeopardize any investigations.



## **WHO WE ARE:**

**Lady Freethinker (LFT) is a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit working to end animal suffering. LFT gives a voice to those who cannot speak out for themselves and effects meaningful, lasting change through investigative reporting and other media, citizen petitions, and partnerships with rescuers and activists on the ground worldwide. Together, we are changing the way the world sees and treats animals for the better. Learn more at [ladyfreethinker.org](https://ladyfreethinker.org).**

## **OUR CALL TO ACTION:**

- We are asking authorities to investigate the conditions documented in this report and take any appropriate enforcement action to ensure that pet stores are complying with the minimum provisions in New Jersey's Pet Purchase Protection Law.**
- We're also asking legislators to sponsor and pass a humane sales bill that would prohibit pet stores from sourcing their dogs from commercial breeders — as six other U.S. states already have done.**
- Finally, we're asking people seeking companion animals to adopt from their local animal shelter, rather than shop at pet stores for their new friends.**







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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



A 2-month-old, white Maltese whose paws and belly were stained yellow with urine was among the first of the puppies offered for purchase to Lady Freethinker's investigator, who arrived at the pet store in New Jersey in October.

The store then presented two cavapoos — one who had fecal matter stuck to his fur and dark-colored debris in his ears, and another who smelled like urine, according to the investigator.

**The store also trotted out a female boxer who urinated in front of the investigator, leaving bloody droplets in her wake. The store associate noted the dog wouldn't be able to go home that day, pending a veterinary exam that week, but encouraged the investigator to pay for the dog upfront anyway.**



The investigator also noted bloody stools and diarrhea at two additional locations selling puppies for thousands of dollars each. At another pet store, the investigator documented dried-up discharge around the nose of an English bulldog selling for \$4,500.

Those circumstances were just some of the concerning conditions documented by LFT's investigator, who visited 14 New Jersey pet stores between October and November 2022 and January 2023.

**While conditions varied across the stores, the investigator observed pet store puppies covered in urine and feces, dogs with bloody diarrhea and urine, dogs who appeared to be skinny or have eye issues, a puppy cowering in the corner of a barren enclosure and also a puppy who appeared to be limping.**





The investigator also documented dogs stacked on top of each other in cages or kept in enclosures with wire-strand flooring — including many who had no toys, blankets, or other enrichment in their enclosures and some of whom also didn't appear to have access to water.

Maureen D'Souza-Borja, a practicing clinic veterinarian who also has a specialty in emergency medicine, reviewed five minutes of the investigation's footage from the various pet stores showing cage sizes, sanitation conditions, and puppy behavior. She described the overall conditions as “concerning” and added that an Italian greyhound cowering in a corner appeared to be “medically ill.”

**“Puppies with bloody stools are likely to be harboring contagious illnesses, so absolutely should not be available for customers to handle without appropriate PPE (personal protective equipment),” D'Souza-Borja told LFT. “The puppy that looks medically ill should be evaluated by a veterinarian ASAP; needless to specify, it could also be shedding contagious or even zoonotic pathogens. The puppies covered in urine should be cleaned. That is a basic hygiene issue; it is inappropriate for any animal to remain covered in urine, and it is unsanitary for customers to be handling animals covered in urine.”**


New Jersey's [Pet Purchase Protection Law](#) requires stores to post breeder information — including the name, street address, web address, and license numbers for each animal's breeder and broker, and also to provide prior to sale the facilities' two most recent inspection results.



But that mandated information was missing or outdated for at least some dogs at 11 of the 14 pet stores visited by LFT’s investigator — or nearly 79 percent of stores. Some employees also refused point-blank to provide information about their breeders, telling the investigator it wasn’t possible to get that information prior to a purchase or a deposit.

Other store employees made statements that contradicted what federal inspectors had noted on inspection reports.

**One store associate told the investigator to “Imagine a farm where dogs run around happy.” Meanwhile, USDA inspection reports for the breeders whose information was publicly posted in the pet store showed that one breeder alone had 464 dogs at the most recent USDA inspection. The average number of dogs per breeder at this specific shop was 103 dogs, according to an LFT analysis.**



United States Department of Agriculture  
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

Customer: [REDACTED]  
Inspection Date: 07-Dec-2022

**Species Inspected**

Cust No	Cert No	Site	Site Name	Inspection
35723	<span style="background-color: black; color: black;">[REDACTED]</span>	001	<span style="background-color: black; color: black;">[REDACTED]</span>	07-DEC-2022

Count	Scientific Name	Common Name
000291	<i>Canis lupus familiaris</i>	DOG ADULT
000173	<i>Canis lupus familiaris</i>	DOG PUPPY
000003	<i>Bubalus bubalis</i>	ASIATIC WATER BUFFALO
000467	<b>Total</b>	

Collectively, LFT’s investigator documented information for 148 breeders within the 14 pet stores — including for 145 facilities which we determined were, or had been, licensed with the USDA.



## **According to an LFT analysis of information posted on kennel cards, provided by store associates or pulled from USDA reports:**

- **Collectively, the USDA-licensed breeders and dealers had 16,507 dogs — including 10,199 adult dogs and 6,308 puppies – at the time of their most recent USDA inspection.**
- **The number of dogs per USDA-licensed breeder/dealer ranged from 2 dogs to 589 dogs.**
- **97 percent of USDA-licensed breeders/dealers had more than 10 dogs at the time of their most recent USDA inspection.**
- **39 percent of USDA-licensed breeders/dealers had more than 100 dogs at the time of their most recent USDA inspection.**
- **Collectively the average number of dogs per USDA-licensed breeder/dealer was 114 dogs, with a median of 82 dogs (with averages of 70 adult dogs and 44 puppies, and medians at 53 adult dogs and 31 puppies).**
- **Collectively, the 14 pet stores were offering at least 68 different breeds of dogs.**





- **42 percent of USDA-licensed breeders/dealers had been cited as having noncompliance or deficiencies with the Animal Welfare Act or USDA regulations at least once since 2014.**
- **23 of the breeders/dealers with noted violations also were cited with deficiencies by federal inspectors in the last three years (from Jan. 1, 2020, onward) — or 38 percent of violators.**
- **Eleven of 14 pet stores — or 79 percent — had either missing or outdated breeder and dealer information posted.**
- **Dogs came from breeders/dealers across 10 different states, with an average transport distance of 929 miles or an estimated 14 hours and 23 minutes.**
- **The closest facility reportedly supplying a pet store was 424 miles away — or an estimated 7 hours and 12 minutes. Meanwhile, the farthest facility was 1540 miles away — or an estimated 22 hours and 57 minute transport time, according to an LFT analysis using Google Maps.**



## A Note On Our Data:

Lady Freethinker's investigator documented information for more than 140 breeders or brokers publicly posted in the 14 pet stores visited in October-November 2022 and January 2023.

For the purpose of our analysis, LFT used the most recent publicly available inspection report from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (as of February 2023) for each breeder or broker to determine the number of dogs on-site at each facility. Given that USDA licensing information was not listed at every shop (nor was it provided when the investigator asked employees for additional details), the information for those specific breeders and dealers was not available for inclusion in our analysis. However, for those specific breeders (without USDA licensing listed) some information was available in the postings — such as the state where the facilities were located. Therefore, the total number of breeders and dealers analyzed for the various aspects in this report will sometimes vary (for example, 145 had USDA licenses listed, so we used 145 breeders/dealers in our analysis of dogs on-site at time of last inspection; but we knew the state locations from posted information for 147 breeders/dealers, so we analyzed the 147 locations for our state data).



It also became clear to our investigator that several shops had posted outdated breeder and dealer information, but employees did not clarify which breeders or dealers were currently serving the shop. In these circumstances, we chose to include all breeders and dealers whose information was publicly posted in the shops, with a reasonable assumption that the posted information indicated that these breeders and dealers at one point were supplying dogs to the shop. Breeders and dealers who sold puppies to numerous pet shops visited by our investigator were only counted once in our analysis.

We believe this approach will provide the most accurate and most comprehensive portrayal of the scale and conditions at the facilities currently selling dogs and puppies to New Jersey pet shops.

To calculate likely transport distances, we analyzed the distance from the breeder/dealer locations as listed on their USDA registrations to the address of the pet stores publicly displaying their information, using Google Maps. In the case where only P.O. boxes were posted, we calculated the distance from the posted city to the pet store address. When multiple routes were listed, to keep our estimates conservative, we chose the shortest route in miles.

For the purposes of this report, LFT defines a “large-scale” operation as any facility that had more than 100 dogs on-site at any given time, as documented by federal inspectors.





# Marketed Dog Breeds

American Eskimo, Basset hound, beagle, beaglepoo, Bernedoodle, Bernese mountain dog, bichpoo, Boston terrier, boxer, cane corso, cavachon, Cavalier King Charles spaniel, cavapoo, Chihuahua, cockapoo, cocker spaniel, cushydoodle, Doberman pinscher, English bulldog, French bulldog, golden retriever, goldenpoo, Great Dane, Havanese, Havapoo, Italian greyhound, Jack Russell terrier, keeshond, Labrador retriever, Lhasapoo, Lhatese, Malshi, Maltese, Maltipoo, miniature Aussiedoodle, miniature dachshund, miniature goldendoodle, miniature pinscher, miniature poodle, Morkie, moyen doodle, papillon, Peketz, Pekingese, Pomeranian, Pomsy, poodle, pug, rottweiler, schnauzer, schnoodle, sheltipoo, Shetland sheepdog, Shiba Inu, Shih-Poo, Shih Tzu, Shiffon, Siberian husky, teddy bear, torkie, toy Australian shepherd, toy poodle, Westie, wheaten terrier, Yorkie-Chon, Yorkie-Poo, Yorkshire terrier

## By The Numbers

- 16,507 Collective # of dogs kept by 145 USDA-licensed facilities supplying 14 NJ pet stores investigated by LFT
- 10,199 Collective # of adult dogs kept by USDA-licensed facilities supplying NJ pet stores investigated by LFT
- 6,308 Collective # of puppies kept by USDA-licensed facilities supplying NJ pet stores investigated by LFT
- 589 Largest # of dogs on-site at a single facility supplying to NJ pet stores
- 114 Average number of dogs per breeder/dealer supplying to NJ pet stores
- 97 Percent of breeders/dealers with more than 10 dogs at their facility
- 68 # of breeds offered by 14 NJ pet stores
- 42 Percent of breeders/dealers cited by the USDA at least once since 2014
- 39 Percent of breeders/dealers with more than 100 dogs at their facility
- 10 # of states supplying puppies to NJ pet stores

Source: Posted or supplied breeder/dealer information at 14 New Jersey pet stores, USDA inspection reports



# CONCERNING CONDITIONS AT PET STORES



Lady Freethinker's investigator noted numerous concerning conditions related to dog health, safety, space, sanitation, and quality of life issues at the 14 pet stores visited.

At one store, an associate encouraged the investigator to pay upfront for a female boxer whose urine was flecked with blood.

**"The store associate said the dog couldn't go home until after her vet visit, but I could pay for her and then take her home afterwards," the investigator told LFT. "I asked, 'What happens if I pay upfront for her and then the vet finds that there is something wrong? Do I get my money back?'"**

**The associate reportedly said that there had never been something significantly wrong with the dogs and that the investigator would be "fine."**



At another pet store, the investigator observed a female French bulldog who had bloody stool and also was eating it.



**"I informed the store associate, but there was no real urgency to get the dog looked at," the investigator said. "The associate said that she'd look at the dog but continued with her conversation."**

At another store, the investigator alerted a store associate to four dogs who appeared not to have any water in their water bottles.

"The store associate had no urgency to fill them up," the investigator said. "I was in the store for about 20 minutes, and even in that time, nothing was done."





## **Other health and sanitation conditions noted by LFT's investigator:**

- **Bloody diarrhea in a kennel housing a miniature Pinscher, a King Charles Cavalier, and a beagle**
- **A miniature Pinscher who appeared to be limping**
- **A Maltese puppy covered in urine**
- **A Malshi whose fur was stained with urine**
- **Two cavapoos who smelled like urine — one of whom also had fecal material stuck to his fur**
- **An English bulldog who had dried nasal discharge and feces-covered paws and was selling for \$4,500**





- **A male cockapoo who appeared to be skinny**
- **A Pekingese puppy who appeared to have conjunctivitis who was selling for \$4,000**
- **A Pomsy who was squinting through one eye**
- **An Italian greyhound puppy noted cowering in the corner of his cage**
- **A puppy with overgrown nails**
- **A Great Dane puppy observed frequently shaking her head**

At one pet store, the investigator noticed a Basset hound and a Pekingese who appeared to be fighting kept together in an enclosure. Rather than separate the dogs, the store associates reportedly hit the cage to get them to stop, according to the investigator — who added the dogs just went back to growling and biting each other.



## Other Quality of Life, Space, and Safety Conditions:

- A Great Dane puppy selling for \$2,500 who was in an enclosure with minimal bedding
- Puppies at multiple pet stores kept in enclosures without blankets or toys
- Dogs sleeping in their dog dishes
- Dogs stacked three cages high at one pet store
- A Bernedoodle and boxer puppy kept in cages that did not provide much head height, one of whom was observed biting the bars of his cage



Maureen D'Souza-Borja, the veterinarian who reviewed LFT's video footage of the pet store conditions, said that animals with bloody diarrhea or stools should not be on display for sale or handling by possible customers and that animals should not be left covered in urine.

**"If they are urinating or defecating on themselves, then they need to be bathed immediately afterward," D'Souza-Borja said. "That is just a practical hygiene habit that will help prevent the development of injuries like urine and fecal scald, discomfort, and secondary infection."**

She added that the Great Dane puppy documented frequently shaking her head could have "some subtle neurological abnormalities" and that the Italian greyhound documented cowering in his cage appeared to be "medically ill."

The overgrown nails of the puppy documented by the investigator were concerning for several reasons, D'Souza-Borja said.

"The nails are too long, and while they are not currently causing physical damage to the paw pads, that is the concern for allowing nail growth to continue without intervention," she said. "It also indicates to me that the puppies are not likely getting enough exercise, as typically concrete or asphalt will wear the nails down."





D'Souza-Borja said that the crates containing a boxer and Bernedoodle puppies were “not big enough to spend most of the day in” and that the dogs stacked in crates on top of each other could face safety issues.

She confirmed the footage revealed possible quality-of-life issues as well.

**“Puppies should have water available at all times and a comfortable, warm place to lie down,” she said. “All animals should have such accommodations. These are considered fundamental physiological needs.”**



# PUPPY SOURCING FROM COMMERCIAL BREEDERS WITH 100+ DOGS

Many people are now familiar with the term “puppy mill” — most commonly defined as any dog breeding operation or facility that seeks to sell puppies for profit while simultaneously not providing for the dogs’ most basic needs, including clean food and water, adequate shelter, and medical care.

The six states that have passed humane pet sales laws — which ban the sourcing of pet store dogs from commercial breeders — recognized that these facilities, involving the breeding of dozens or even hundreds of dogs to be sold at a profit, invite neglect.

Most of the pet store employees who spoke with LFT’s investigator did not speak to the scale of many of the breeders supplying their operations.

**When the investigator asked one pet store employee whether breeders had “like 100 dogs” at their facilities, the employee said “No” with an emphatic shake of his head.**

Public records from the USDA, however, showed that at least 14 of the breeders — or 27 percent — who were supplying to two of the store’s locations had more than 100 dogs at their last inspection, according to their most recent publicly available inspection reports. One facility alone had 328 dogs and puppies counted by federal inspectors.





United States Department of Agriculture  
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

Customer: [REDACTED]  
Inspection Date: 04-Nov-2022

### Species Inspected

Cust No	Cert No	Site	Site Name	Inspection
502840	[REDACTED]	001	[REDACTED]	04-NOV-2022
<b>Count</b>	<b>Scientific Name</b>	<b>Common Name</b>		
000155	<i>Canis lupus familiaris</i>	DOG ADULT		
000173	<i>Canis lupus familiaris</i>	DOG PUPPY		
000328	<b>Total</b>			

At another store, an employee told the inspector to “Imagine a farm where dogs run around happy.” When asked if dogs were kept in kennels at these facilities, the employee said “No.”



United States Department of Agriculture  
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

Customer: [REDACTED]  
Inspection Date: 06-Jan-2022

### Species Inspected

Cust No	Cert No	Site	Site Name	Inspection
324362	[REDACTED]	001	[REDACTED]	06-JAN-2022
<b>Count</b>	<b>Scientific Name</b>	<b>Common Name</b>		
000445	<i>Canis lupus familiaris</i>	DOG ADULT [REDACTED]		
000144	<i>Canis lupus familiaris</i>	DOG PUPPY [REDACTED]		
000589	<b>Total</b>			

Meanwhile, USDA records show that at least eight of the breeders supplying the store — or 36 percent of the store’s USDA-licensed breeders — had more than 100 dogs at the time of their most recently available inspection reports.

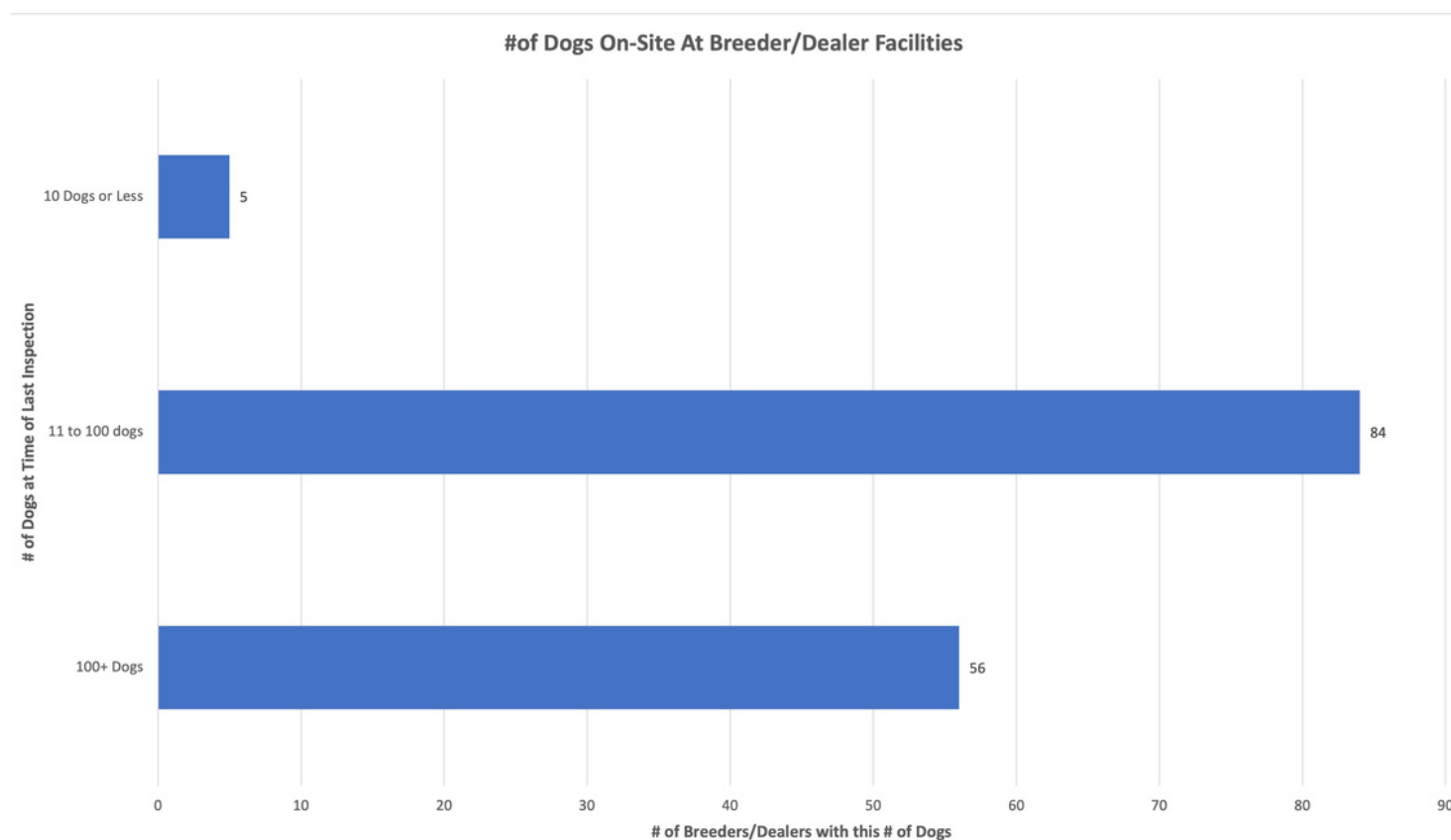


# According to LFT's analysis:

- ◆ Collectively, 145 breeders and dealers with USDA license numbers had 16,507 dogs in their custody at the time of their respective last inspections — with an average of 114 dogs and a median value of 82 dogs per facility.
- ◆ Facilities averaged 70 adult dogs and 44 puppies, with medians of 53 adult dogs and 31 puppies per facility.
- ◆ 39 percent of breeders/dealers (56) had more than 100 dogs.
- ◆ 58 percent of breeders/dealers (84) had between 11 and 100 dogs.
- ◆ Only 3 percent of breeders/dealers (5) had 10 dogs or less.
- ◆ The number of dogs at each facility ranged from two dogs to 589 dogs.



## # of Dogs On-Site At Breeder/Dealer Facilities



Source: Posted facility information and most recently available USDA inspection reports as of February 2023.

Meanwhile, 11 of the 14 pet stores visited by LFT’s investigator — or 79 percent — had missing or outdated information about their breeders or dealers, according to our analysis of posted material in the pet stores.

The investigator noted four pet stores that did not have all — or any — of the state-required breeder information listed for all of the dogs observed on-site at the time of the visit. Upon querying the employees, the investigator was not able to obtain any additional details about who had supplied the dogs.

At one store without the requisite breeder information posted, for example, the investigator approached a store associate about a Maltese-Shih Tzu mix selling for \$2,800 and a mini poodle selling for \$1,800.

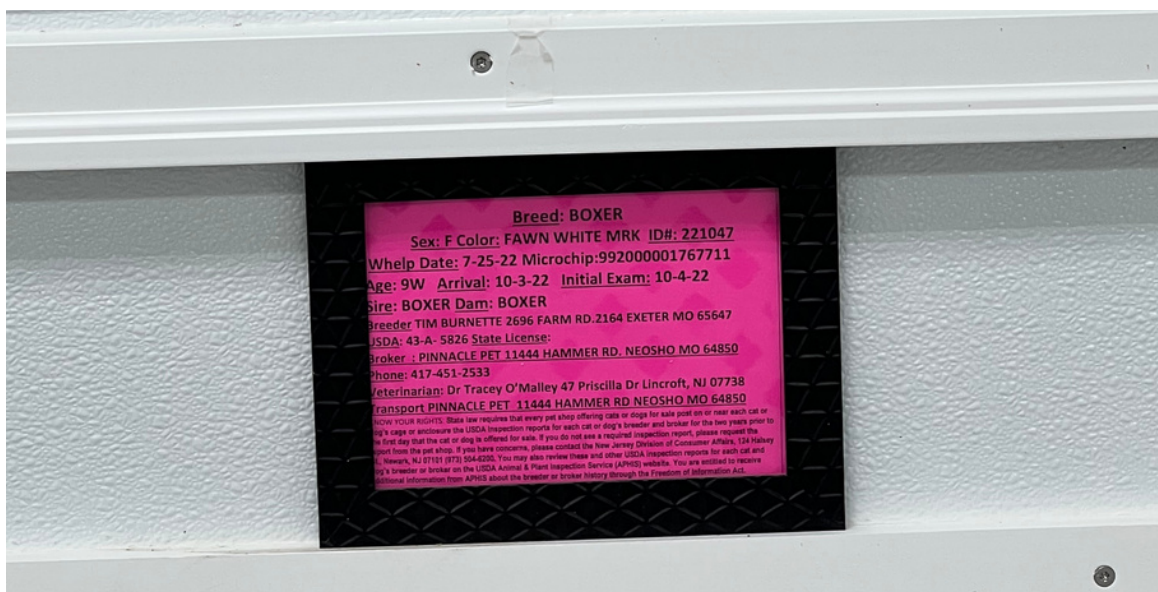




**"I asked if I could look up the breeder information prior to purchasing the puppies, and she (the store associate) said 'No,'" the investigator said. "The associate mentioned that she would give me the information after the purchase. I also asked if I could see the mini poodle's breeder information, and the associate again said, 'No,' not unless I purchased the puppy or put down a deposit."**

Nine of the pet stores also had posted outdated information — with at least some of the publicly posted USDA license numbers having a status of “Canceled,” according to the USDA licensing portal. While LFT’s research team was able to track the canceled licenses to newly issued, different certificate numbers by navigating that federal portal, the up-to-date license numbers were not publicly displayed in the pet stores for potential consumers, to the best of our knowledge.

One of the pet stores also had posted information in the back of the cage in font so small it was indecipherable to LFT’s investigator, who had to use technology to enlarge the font to read the details.



Store employees who spoke with the investigator claimed their suppliers had clean histories with the USDA when it came to meeting animal welfare mandates. While many of the facilities in this report did not have any deficiencies noted by federal inspectors at their most recent inspections, some of them did have issues — including animals with untreated medical conditions and unsanitary facilities — in the past. Several also had deficiencies noted within the past three years by federal inspectors.

Since 2014, the USDA has cited 61 of the 145 breeders and dealers whose licensing information was publicly posted in the NJ pet stores at the time of our investigator’s visit — or 42 percent.

2.40(b)(2)	DIRECT	REPEAT
ATTENDING VETERINARIAN AND ADEQUATE VETERINARY CARE (DEALERS AND EXHIBITORS).		
***A female Maltese (#0A02025544) was consistently holding the right front foot up and only occasionally bearing weight on the foot while it was on the outdoor portion of the wire floor enclosure. On closer observation, there was a slightly reddened area between the toes on the right front foot. There appeared to be a small circular greyish white nodule-like lesion located centrally within the reddened area. Also, one of the nails on the middle toes was excessively long. This abnormal lesion between the toes could be the result of injury, infection or a variety of veterinary medical conditions which may be painful.		
***A male Maltese (#0A02041336) was shaking its head and scratching at its right ear. On closer observation there was a buildup of dark brown to black material noted in and around the entrance to the ear canal. There were also some pinpoint reddened areas noted on the inner earflap near the ear canal. The abnormal buildup of material in this ear could indicate an infection or other veterinary medical condition which could be uncomfortable for the dog.		
*** A male Maltese (#093010823) had a dental condition and overgrown toenails. Most of dog's teeth were missing. There was a thick layer of dark brown buildup on two lower cheek teeth on each side of the mouth with a line of grey buildup present on these teeth along the gum line. The right lower canine tooth was loose. Both lower canines had noticeable pockets at the gum line and the roots were easily visible. The gums had receded and appeared reddened along all teeth. Also, the dog's toenails were grown out to a length that did not allow for normal positioning of the digits on the rear right foot. The dental issues can increase the risk of infection and can decrease the animal's ability to eat and/or properly chew food. Improper care of toenails can increase the risk of lameness, gait abnormalities, and discomfort to the dog.		
These dogs' conditions had not been noticed by the licensee until the inspector pointed them out and none of the		

Some of the breeders were cited only for not being home at the time inspectors stopped by, or what the USDA calls “teachable moments” — including dogs kept in kennels without enough head height, walls not being impervious to moisture, feeders with a buildup of debris, missing records, and dogs who needed their nails trimmed.



## Some of the offenses, as documented by federal inspectors:

- Dogs with untreated lesions, including a female dog with two circular lesions of scabbed and crusted skin on her neck and ear and a King Charles spaniel with a lesion between the toes of his foot
- Untreated eye issues — including for an English bulldog with inflamed tissues secreting a green discharge, a King Charles spaniel who had green discharge covering more than half of each eye, and Polly the Shih Tzu, who had engorged blood vessels and discharge from her eye
- Other untreated or improperly treated medical conditions, including for a poodle with bloody stool who was sold without the required vet exam, a Cocker spaniel with “a large amount of black, greasy material covering most of the inner surfaces of both ears,” a Chihuahua with a swollen ear and jaw and an open wound secreting yellow discharge and blood, and a cane corso and a Dogue de Bordeaux with leg injuries that caused limping
- 33 dogs at a single facility who had dental disease — including 23 dogs with advanced, Grade 4 periodontal disease and 10 dogs who had Grade 3, as indicated by heavy buildup, red and receding gums exposing tooth roots, loose and missing teeth, and discharge from the gum lines



- A breeder with four dogs with excessively long nails — including one whose nails “curled to the side of her digits” and was holding her rear leg up — and who did not consult a veterinarian after one puppy died and another started deteriorating
- Vulnerable puppies housed outdoors in cold weather with little to no bedding or heat — including a facility keeping Yorkies outdoors in 11 degree weather, with the dogs seen “intermittently shivering and holding their front paws up for short period of time”
- Enclosures with gaps large enough to ensnare dogs’ legs and cause injury and insecure enclosures that allowed multiple dogs to escape
- Filthy feeders, including at one facility whose feeders for 12 dogs were “covered with a whitish, mold-like material”

Of the breeders and dealers with noted deficiencies, 23 have had violations within the last three years (from Jan. 1, 2020, onward) — or about 38 percent of the violators.

## The welfare and other deficiencies by federal inspectors in that more recent timeframe:

- A female Pomeranian observed “awkwardly sitting in the corner of her enclosure with one hind leg raised while other animals were jumping and stepping on her” who had an untreated lesion, a swollen vulva and an inflamed back leg





- **Sanitation issues: including self-feeders with built up food and debris, a facility where nine outdoor dog runs were more than 75 percent covered in feces, and another facility with noted bird droppings**
- **A dog kept in an enclosure without 6 inches of head height**
- **Dogs who needed their nails trimmed and their ears cleaned more frequently**
- **Six dogs who had escaped their enclosures and were running loose**
- **Multiple breeders and dealers not being available during federal inspections**
- **Multiple dog housing areas in need of repair, including enclosures where gaps could have allowed animals to become injured had they gotten their limbs stuck and chewed/worn materials with jagged edges**
- **Incomplete records and records not kept as required**

LFT's analysis also revealed dogs were being transported significant distances to the New Jersey pet stores from out of state.

LFT's investigator, who also has worked other undercover investigations into pet stores and their suppliers in New York state, said that for those other investigations, the long transports could pose additional welfare issues for puppies.

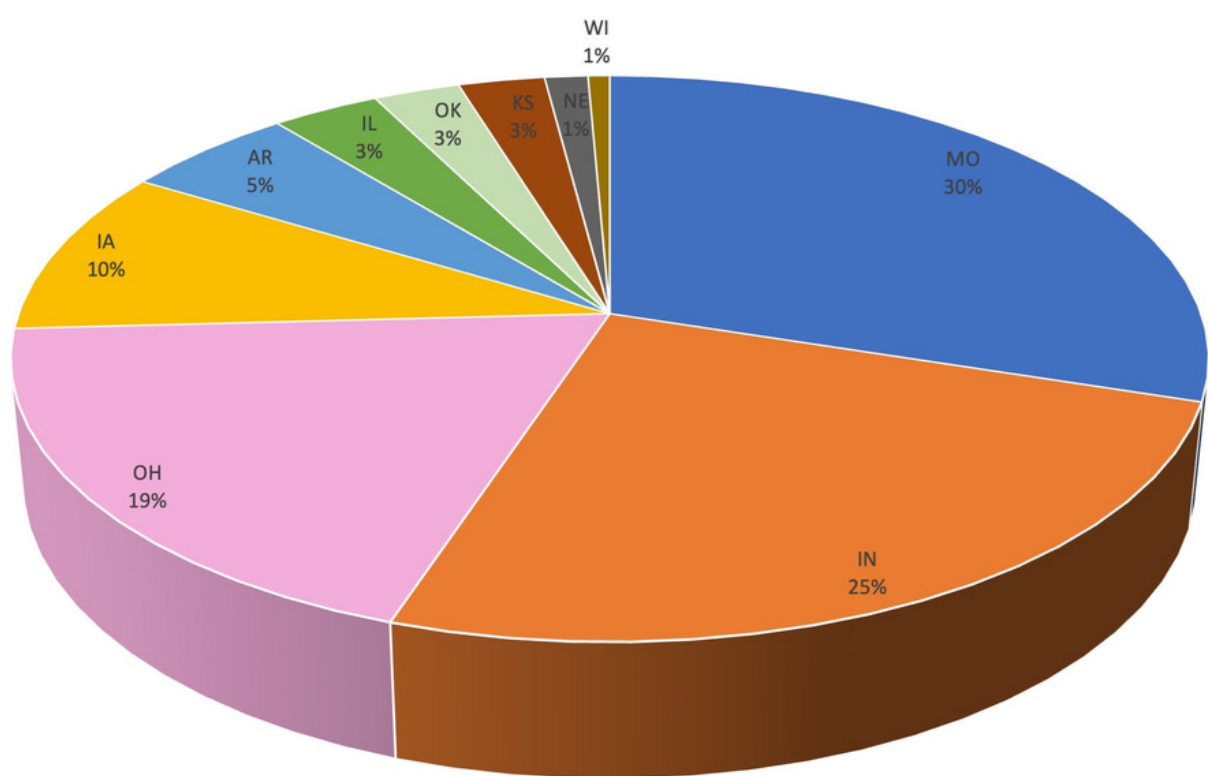


“The drive can be 16-20 hours,” the investigator told LFT about those previous investigations. "When I completed two undercover investigations into pet stores in New York City, I was able to talk to the transport drivers. They mentioned that the dogs don't get let out of their cages so they come covered in urine and fecal matter. Some dogs become too sick and don't make the long trip. It's really sad."

Specific to this investigation of New Jersey pet stores, USDA licenses posted by the pet shops placed breeders and dealers across 10 states, with the most located in Missouri (30 percent of total breeders/dealers), followed by Indiana (25 percent) and Ohio (19 percent).

But dogs also reportedly came from facilities in Arkansas (5 percent), Illinois (3 percent), Oklahoma (3 percent), and Kansas (3 percent), and as far away as Iowa (10 percent), Wisconsin (1 percent) and Nebraska (1 percent), according to USDA reports.

### Puppies Trucked In To NJ Pet Stores From Out of State



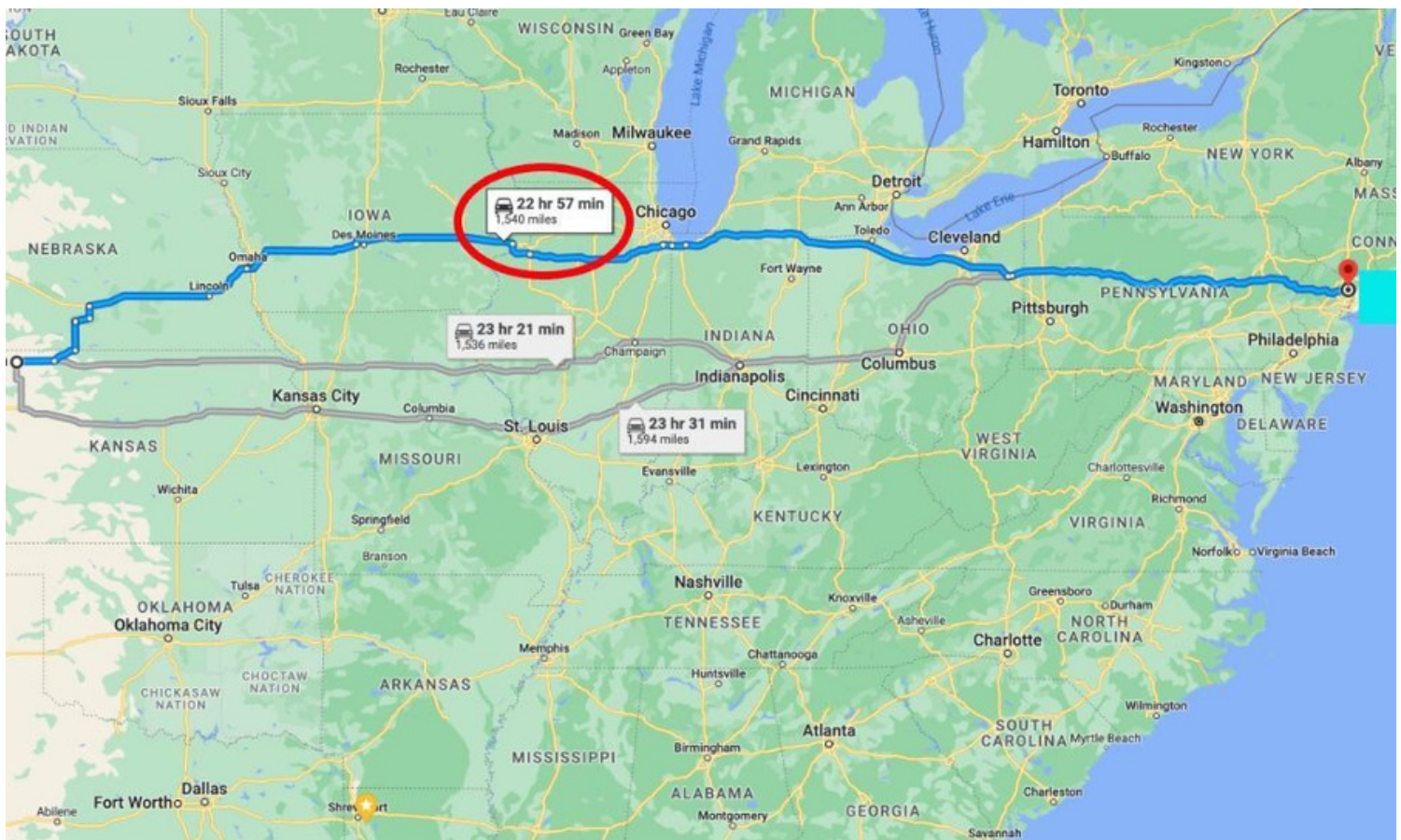
Source: Posted/Supplied breeder/dealer information, USDA inspection reports



According to LFT’s analysis, the average distance dogs and puppies traveled — from facility to pet store — was 929 miles, for an estimated travel time (without stops) of 14 hours and 23 minutes, according to Google Maps.

The median distance from facility to pet store was 1,011 miles, for an estimated travel time of 15 hours and 32 minutes, according to Google Maps.

Meanwhile, the farthest facility reportedly supplying one of the pet stores was 1,540 miles away from that store — for an estimated travel time of 22 hours and 57 minutes for dogs and puppies, according to Google Maps.



Source: Google Maps, emphasis by Lady Freethinker



## A Note on Federal Inspections and Regulation:

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) uses a risk-based inspection system to determine how often inspectors will physically view a licensee's property to ensure the facility is meeting the minimum standards mandated by the federal Animal Welfare Act.

There's a public perception that USDA licensees receive routine annual inspections and that their active licenses hinge on them not having any welfare violations.

According to the USDA, however, the frequency of inspections can range from every three months for facilities with multiple past deficiencies to "once every year, or every 2–3 years, or in some cases only when we receive a complaint."

As of March 2023, the USDA had not posted any federal inspections of facilities in the past year for 17 of the breeders and dealers whose licensing information was publicly posted in the New Jersey pet shops during the time of our investigator's visits in 2022.

The USDA did not provide any additional information on whether these facilities had inspections (the results of which were not publicly posted) or whether these facilities had not had an inspection within the last year.

The 17 breeders and dealers were supplying to 10 of the 14 pet stores visited by LFT's investigator — or 71 percent.





# ADOPT DON'T SHOP

While we at Lady Freethinker believe that every animal has a right to be here and has worth simply by existing, the bottom line is that buying from breeders contributes to animal suffering by fueling the demand for certain breeds.

Treating dogs as commodities rather than individuals sets the stage for abuse and neglect by those seeking to maximize profits while reducing financial costs – at the expense of the animals' well-being.



With over 3 million dogs entering U.S. animal shelters each year, buying from breeders instead of adopting also fuels the overpopulation crisis and means a dog in a shelter waiting for a loving home loses their chance.

We encourage everyone to adopt new companion animals from shelters, small rescues, or other reputable nonprofits. These types of organizations are often at capacity or stretched for space while constantly confronted with abandoned, surrendered, or abused dogs.



The result is that no-kill shelters often have to turn away animals in need of love and care, while county shelters often instead kill animals to make room — with the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) estimating 920,000 healthy shelter animals are killed in the United States each year.

Shelter staff know the animals' personalities and can help you find the right fit for your lifestyle, as well as any behavioral issues that might be a deal breaker. Shelters also often require meet-and-greets prior to adoption so you can interact with the dog to make sure their claims are true and that you and the dog like each other.

We encourage people seeking a particular type of companion animal — such as a dog whose fur is hypoallergenic — to do a little digging, as many rescues exist in the country that specifically rescue certain breeds of animals.

Armani, who was adopted by an LFT staffer, is a great example of how adopting an animal in need helps save lives. Read his story below:

## Armani's Rescue Story

**Armani was adopted by Dana, LFT's Operations Director, and her husband Torrey in 2018. He was rescued from the streets of Tijuana where he was found with a shattered hip and many bite wounds. Now living the good life in Pacific Beach, California, he spends his days sleeping under Dana's desk as she works every day to help save animals in need just like him.**





# NEW JERSEY CONSUMER PROTECTION

New Jersey's Pet Purchase Protection Law requires cage labels to have the name, street address, web address, and license number for each breeder or dealer supplying NJ pet stores.

Pet stores also are required to prominently display “Know Your Rights” information for purchasers, as well as the results of the two most recent inspections at each facility where dogs were bred or housed.

“The sign must direct consumers to request any undisplayed reports and inform consumers concerning how to obtain more information about inspections,” the New Jersey Division of Consumer Affairs wrote in an informational flier about the consumer protection law.

The law also forbids the sale of any animal from a breeder or dealer who doesn't hold required state or federal licensing, has violated animal welfare laws in the past two years, or has refused to grant inspectors access to their facilities in the past two years.

While this law is helpful to a degree, there clearly are some stores that don't appear to be abiding by the state's rules — such as the pet stores and their associates who did not post any breeder information for some of their dogs and who refused to provide breeder information to LFT's investigator prior to purchase.



The presence of urine-covered animals and likely health issues documented by the investigator also is, as the veterinary professional described, “concerning.”

Many states have banned the sales of dogs, cats, rabbits and other live animals to cut down on possible cruelty.

“There have to be stricter guidelines because New Jersey is not doing enough,” the investigator told LFT. “Stores are getting away with not providing the breeder information, and even when they do, our research is showing that it’s not always up to date.”

New Jersey legislators must step up to sponsor and pass humane pet sales legislation, banning the pet store sales of dogs from breeders to help stop preventable suffering and commodification of dogs and puppies.

In the meantime, anyone who has purchased a sick puppy from a New Jersey pet store should immediately contact the New Jersey Division of Consumer Affairs to file an official complaint:

## **NEW JERSEY DIVISION OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS**

**Website:** [www.njconsumeraffairs.gov](http://www.njconsumeraffairs.gov)

**Phone:** 1-800-242-5846 OR 973-504-6200

**Lady Freethinker encourages everyone to**

**~ Always Remember to Adopt — Not Shop! —  
For Companion Animals! ~**

