

It's Time to Enact Effective, Equitable, and Enforceable Regulations for Virginia's Pet Stores

Public and private animal shelters in Virginia are held to high welfare standards. They must abide by stringent laws and directives, maintain detailed records and protocols, and secure the services of a supervising veterinarian. Animal shelters are regularly inspected, and if violations are found, they can be fined up to **\$1,000 per day**. However, Virginia's pet stores, including those that sell puppies obtained from out-of-state high-volume breeders (puppy mills), have thus far escaped any such oversight.



The Puppy Shop in Manassas

Thanks to legislation passed by the Virginia General Assembly in 2020, the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) has proposed draft regulations for pet stores. The proposed regulations are widely supported by animal welfare stakeholders in the Commonwealth. **However, they contain imbalances, not only in the outlined requirements but also in the penalties or lack thereof.** As written, the proposed regulations are not sufficient to protect puppies and kittens sold in pet stores and offer preferential—and inequitable—rules for these businesses, requiring far less of them than is required of nonprofit and government-run agencies.

To protect animals and consumers, pet stores must be held to ***the same welfare standards as our state's animal shelters, at a minimum.***

TWO MAJOR AREAS THAT REQUIRE ATTENTION

- Animal shelters in Virginia are required to **engage a licensed veterinarian** to develop protocols for the care of animals in their custody, yet the proposed pet shop regulations include no such requirement despite the dozens of vulnerable puppies they offer for sale, who commonly originate in notoriously disease-ridden puppy mills.
- Animal shelters found by a VDACS inspector to have violated state law are subject to **civil fines of up to \$1,000 per day** until the issue is corrected. These fines help ensure that any lapse in animal care standards is rapidly corrected. In the proposed pet store regulations, civil penalties like these—or any other meaningful enforcement action—are absent, removing any incentive to comply.

A recent PETA investigation into more than a dozen pet stores in Virginia found multiple violations of *current* laws, including a lack of required signage and a refusal to provide prospective buyers with records pertaining to the breeder and the animal's health. Unless penalties for violations include fines and other meaningful enforcement action, pet stores are likely to disregard the new regulations, just as they disregard the current ones.

PET STORES ARE CURRENTLY FLOUTING EXISTING LAW

In November 2022, a PETA investigator visited 16 of Virginia's 18 pet stores that sell puppies and found that most either failed to display a sign stating that the U.S. Department of Agriculture inspection reports on the breeders whose puppies they sell are available to customers prior to purchase or outright refused to show prospective buyers the dogs' records. **These are violations of Va. Code Ann. § 3.2-6513.1.**



Pauley's Pups in Ashland

Violations of Va. Code Ann. § 3.2-6513.1

| Pet Store | Didn't clearly display a sign indicating that USDA APHIS reports were available for review | Didn't provide prospective buyers with the opportunity to view all paperwork required by state law |
|-----------------------------------|--|--|
| Family Pet Center (Chesapeake) | X | |
| My Next Puppy (Chantilly) | X | X |
| Pauley's Pups (Ashland) | | X |
| Pet Go Round (Virginia Beach) | X | |
| Pets N Pals (Staunton) | X | X |
| Pets Plus Inc. (Stafford) | X | X |
| Pet World (Hampton) | | X |
| Puppy City (Harrisonburg) | | X |
| Puppy Shop (Manassas) | | X |
| Pups N Stuff (Virginia Beach) | | X |
| Superstar Puppies (Fairfax) | | X |
| Tiny Paws Pet Shop (Ruckersville) | X | X |
| Wee Pups (Franklin) | X | |
| XO Pups (Chantilly) | X | X |

If you buy her, you can have her paperwork, but if you don't buy her ... we can't show her paperwork That's the owner's rules. That's the owner's rules. He's got several different reasons for it. You know. That's his rules, and I'm not gonna go against them.

—Pet World employee, November 7, 2022

Yeah, once you pay for him, then they can show it to you. But, like, we don't show any of that until the puppy is paid for. ... And it's pretty much just to protect the breeders, too. It's their privacy rights, so they have a right to their privacy, too.

—Pauley's Pups employee, November 15, 2022

The doctors at the emergency room treated her for hypoglycemia (extremely low blood sugar), hematochezia (blood in stool), anemia (lack of healthy red blood cells), leukocytosis (high levels of white blood cells), and monocytosis (possible autoimmune blood disorder)—all signs that there are infection(s) and more medical issues.

—BBB complaint re My Next Puppy LLC in Chantilly

We were told he had a slight cold and would be fine. The next day, he was having difficulty breathing. Took him to the vet near their shop and the puppy needed to be placed on antibiotics. A week later, he was worse and needed to go to the emergency vet, and he was started on more antibiotics.

Please do not purchase puppies from the facility! I work in a nearby veterinary hospital and in the past week alone, we've seen multiple puppies recently purchased from here with pneumonia. One had kennel cough as well, and another is critical and oxygen-dependent.

—Google reviews re Superstar Puppies in Fairfax

PROFIT OVER CARE

\$9,750

(“reduced” from \$15,000) for an English bulldog at My Next Puppy in Chantilly

\$5,999

for a French bulldog at Pet & Aquatic Warehouse in Lynchburg

\$4,800

for a “Mini Aussiedoo” at Pet Go Round in Virginia Beach

180

Average number of dogs at individual USDA-licensed breeders supplying Virginia pet stores

11,130

Total number of dogs at USDA-licensed breeders supplying 16 Virginia pet stores as of the latest USDA inspections

While Virginia's shelters struggle with a homeless animal and overpopulation crisis that is taxing resources, Virginia's pet stores import puppies from puppy mills across the country into the Commonwealth.

Family Pet Center in Chesapeake even obtains puppies from a notorious Kansas breeding mill called BJ's & Guys that had **976 dogs** on its property as of a March 2022 inspection. This breeder has a long history of USDA violations for failing to provide veterinary care and keeping dogs in hazardous conditions. Despite this, Family Pet Center claims on its website, “None of our dogs are puppy mill dogs.”

Holding hundreds of animals on a single property creates the perfect breeding ground for contagious diseases and allows health problems to flourish, as evidenced by the many online customer reviews revealing that sick puppies are being sold to the public.

Businesses that sell dogs for as much as \$15,000 should be required to adhere to at least the same standards as animal shelters. The pet stores PETA's investigator visited promote sky-high interest loans by third-party companies, such as was exposed in a September 30, 2022, *Washington Post* article: “[States Move to Ban High Interest Loans at Pet Shops.](#)”

At a minimum, pet stores should be subject to requirements as important as those currently in place for Virginia's animal shelters, and there must be meaningful consequences for failing to comply with basic standards of care. A pet store whose permit is revoked should not be permitted to reapply immediately, especially in cases of repeated or egregious violations. VDACS should also be able to bring civil penalties for regulatory violations, just as it can when enforcing animal shelter regulations. Pet stores must be required to engage a licensed veterinarian to develop protocols for veterinary care, medications, presale exams, age-appropriate tests, and vaccinations. This is already required of our private and public animal shelters, and it would prevent needless suffering caused by a lack of veterinary care in addition to protecting public health.