Wire

New study sheds light on source of puppies sold online and in stores

By Clark Kauffman

Iowa Capital Dispatch

An Iowa-based animal welfare organization has conducted what may be the first nationwide study of regulatory violations among dog breeders who supply brokers and retailers with animals.

The study shows that more than half of the breeders or brokers who supply retail stores with puppies, and who have been tracked over the past three years by the nonprofit organization Bailing Out Benji, have been cited for regulatory violations.

Mindi Callison, executive director of the Iowa-based nonprofit organization, says that for decades, there has been a lack of data surrounding the pet-acquisition industry — particularly with regard to the complicated intersection of breeders, brokers and sellers.

To address that issue, Callison says, Bailing Out Benji has widened its scope of research from federally licensed breeders who sell to pet shops to include statelicensed breeders and dealers as well as online sellers and the brokers who act as "middle men" in the trafficking of animals.

The research, she says, paints a fuller picture of the issues that the commercial dog-breeding world faces, and is the first of its kind. It's based on an analysis of five years of data on the thousands of breeders who are licensed at the federal and state level, plus three years of data on the breeders who supply pet stores.

"For the first time ever, the commercial dog breeding and sales industry has been audited," she said. "These facts and figures will allow for us to track progress on the national level, while giving us a more clear picture on where the problem areas are so they can be addressed."

She said the first step toward meaningful change is

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having a clear understanding of the scope of the problem. "This data will be a game changer for those who are passionate about using real facts to drive that change for animals and the people who love them," she said, adding that the data will help her and others track progress when advocates and lawmakers are trying to pass legislation related to animal welfare.

The data, Callison said, provides national averages for regulatory violations among licensed breeders, the breeders and brokers who supply pet stores, the breeders who supply third-party brokers, and the breeders and brokers who sell through online websites.

She said that in Iowa, specifically, about 33% of the brokers and breeders licensed at the state and federal level have been cited for regulatory violations at some point in the past five years.

"That is slightly lower than what we are seeing as the national average and is based on 678 facilities we are tracking in Iowa — which includes breeders who recently canceled their licenses after they had violations," she said. "On the pet-store side, we are seeing that 28% percent of the breeders in Iowa that have sold to pet stores in the last three years have had violations."

Among the study's national findings:

— Violations by breeders: 41% of the licensed breeders have incurred state or federal violations during the past five years.

— Breeders to stores: 36% of the 1,946 licensed breeders who directly supplied pet stores in the last three years have incurred state or federal violations.

— Breeders to brokers: 34% of the breeders found to be supplying brokers in the last three years had incurred state or federal violations. Callison notes that this finding is based on preliminary data that may be updated since it does not reflect every breeder who sells through brokers.

— Puppy stores: 63% of the 542 puppy stores that have been tracked over the last three years have purchased puppies from breeders or brokers with known regulatory violations. This data excludes stores with common, shared ownership and which don't receive shipments directly from the breeders or brokers.

- Online sales: 42% of the licensed breeders known to be supplying online brokering websites or online marketplaces have incurred state or federal violations. This data doesn't capture every breeder who sells through an online broker, with Callison noting that some breeders who sell through such websites are unlicensed.

With regard to the online brokers and the unlicensed breeders who supply them, Callison said Bailing Out Benji is currently tracking thousands of unlicensed breeders and is in the process of auditing more than 20,000 online sellers who traffic animals through three brokering websites.

Once Bailing Out Benji has more conclusive data to share on that universe of sales, she said, the organization will update its reporting.

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SOUTHWEST IOWA PLANNING COUNCIL

SWIPCO Policy Council Meeting

April 24, 2025, 1:30 p.m. SWIPCO Conference Room (1501 SW 7th St., Atlantic, IA) OR via Zoom

Minutes

1. Call to Order. Chair Green called the meeting to order at 1:39 p.m.

2. **Roll Call.** SWIPCO Policy Council Members Present: Fran Brannan, Richard Crouch, Grace Garrett, Joe George, Steve Green, Ross Hastert, AJ Lyman, Todd Maher, Susan Miller, Charlie Parkhurst, Jenna Ramsey, Jeff Shearer, Susan Shepherd, Tony Smith, Sherman Struble, Todd Valline. SWIPCO staff members present; Daurine Petersen, Mark Lander, Rhonda Brown, John McCurdy, Chris Parks. Others in attendance: Rachel Goettsch, MAPA.

3. **Discuss/Approve Agenda**. McCurdy stated that an item should be added to approve Ross Hastert as a 2nd Representative for Shelby County. He was just recently approved by the Shelby County Board of Supervisors. Chair Green suggested it be included as item 3B. Garrett moved to approve the amended agenda to include approval of Hastert. George seconded. The motion passed with all ayes.

3B. Approve Ross Hastert as a 2nd Representative for Shelby County on SWIPCO Policy Council. Parkhurst moved to approve Hastert as a 2nd Representative. Struble seconded. The motion passed with all ayes.

4. **Public Hearing – Iowa DOT Consolidated Funding Grant Application.** Lander opened the hearing by reading the funding request numbers from the application and explaining where those numbers come from. Valline moved to close the hearing at 1:50 p.m. Parkhurst seconded. The motion passed with all ayes.

5. Discuss/Approve Minutes – March 27, 2025. Miller moved to approve the March 27th meeting minutes. Ramsey seconded. The motion passed with all ayes.
6. Discuss/Approve Financial Report. Brown discussed the financial report. In community development

6. **Discuss/Approve Financial Report.** Brown discussed the financial report. In community development she pointed out contract services that were paid for lead reimbursement and RPA Quarter 3 request. On the expense side she highlighted grant expense which was for the lead program. In Transit she pointed out FTA money pending and McCurdy discussed bus depreciation. Struble moved to approve the financial report. Crouch seconded. The motion passed with all ayes.

7. **Discuss/Approve Payment of Bills**. Payments that were highlighted were the two payments for our recent business loans and one for and engine replacement that was approved at the last meeting. Struble moved to approve payment of bills. Crouch seconded. The motion passed with all ayes.

Discuss/Approve Agency Expenditures, None
 Appoint Budget Committee. McCurdy discussed the budget timeline and process. Those who volunteered to be on the budget committee were Steve Green, Susan Miller, Joe George, Ross Hastert, and Jenna Ramsey. Parkhurst moved to approve the volunteers to the budget committee. Valline seconded. The motion passed with all ayes.

10. Approve the Iowa DOT Consolidated Funding Application Authorizing Resolution. George moved to authorize the funding application resolution. Miller seconded. Roll call vote all in favor: Fran Brannan, Richard Crouch, Grace Garrett, Joe George, Steve Green, Ross Hastert, Todd Maher, Susan Miller, Charlie Parkhurst, Jenna Ramsey, Jeff Shearer, Susan Shepherd, Tony Smith, Sherman Struble, Todd Valline.

11. Discuss/Approve SWITA Driver and SWIPCO Staff Amended Dress Codes. McCurdy discussed updates to both the SWITA Driver and SWIPCO staff dress codes. Driver changes were mostly just to require some form of identifying SWITA clothing. More items will be given to new hires, and a store will be opened twice a year for drivers to purchase more apparel. SWIPCO staff dress code was affected and became lax during the pandemic. This update brings things back to a higher standard, while also modernizing to a dress for your day policy. Parkhurst moved to approve the two amended dress codes. Hastert seconded. The motion passed with all ayes.

12. Discuss/Approve Amendment to Agency Policy Regarding Return to Work and Fit for Duty Testing. McCurdy discussed that fit for duty scenarios had been handled on a case-by-case basis before but staff felt like it was time for a policy to be put in place. This often applies to cognitive concern

scenarios. The local hospital has the capacity to perform all the necessary testing and a process for being approved as fit for duty is spelled out. Miller stated that these things can often change, and the policy may have to morph over time. Struble moved to approve the policy. Ramsey seconded. The motion passed with all ayes.

13. **Discuss/Approve Executive Director Annual Compensation.** The executive committee discussed meeting prior to the full meeting to discuss performance. They felt it was a good discussion and recommended a 3% increase for McCurdy. This will be applicable retroactive to April 1st. Garrett moved to approve the recommended 3% increase. Ramsey seconded. The motion passed with all ayes. 14. **Public Comment Period.** None.

15. **Board Sharing.** Miller appreciated SWIPCO/SWITA presenting at the Pottawattamie County Board of Supervisors recent meeting. She said it was very eye-opening for some members, and she sees the value in reminding counties what SWIPCO/SWITA do.

16. Other Business. None.

 Adjourn. Struble moved to adjourn. Maher seconded. The motion passed with all ayes. Chair Green adjourned the meeting at 2:31 p.m.

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SOUTHWEST IOWA PLANNING COUNCIL

SWIPCO Policy Council Meeting

May 22, 2025, 1:30 p.m. SWIPCO Conference Room (1501 SW 7th St., Atlantic, IA) OR via Zoom

MINUTES

- 1. Call to Order. Chair Green called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m.
- Roll Call. SWIPCO Policy Council Members Present: Richard Crouch, Grace Garrett, Joe George, Steve Green, Ross Hastert, AJ Lyman, Susan Miller, Charlie Parkhurst, Jeff Shearer, Susan Shepherd, Sherman Struble. SWIPCO Staff Present: John McCurdy, Daurine Petersen, Mark Lander, Rhonda Brown, Brandie McFarland, Chris Parks. Others: Tracee Knapp, Congressman Zach Nunn's Office; Rachel Goetsch, MAPA.
- 3. Discuss/Approve Agenda. Parkhurst moved to approve the agenda. Crouch seconded. The motion carried with all ayes.
- 4. Discuss/Approve Minutes April 24, 2025. George moved to approve the agenda. Parkhurst seconded. The motion carried with all ayes.
- 5. **Discuss/Approve Payment of Bills.** Parkhurst moved to pay the bills. Struble seconded. The motion carried with all ayes.
- 6. Discuss/Approve Agency Expenditures
 - Approval to purchase 3 minivans on DOT contract not to exceed \$314,500 (\$104,833 per vehicle). Lander described the purchase of three minivans that are wheelchair accessible. Have been anticipating this contract and now need approval to order. He said the turnaround was expected to be around 5-6 months. Miller moved to approve the purchase. Crouch seconded. The motion carried with all ayes.
 - b. Approval to replace engine on bus 1706 for \$12,250. Lander said the issue with the engine on this bus used for student transportation is a bad cam. They could just replace the cam but the second cam on the engine is just as old and could fail as well. More cost effective to replace engine altogether. Garrett moved to approve the repair. George seconded. The motion carried with all ayes.
- 7. Amend Agency Signatory Resolution. Amendment of the signatory resolution would remove Erin Hudson and add Kristen Templeton to the approved signatories along with John McCurdy and Mark Lander. Crouch moved to approve the amended resolution. Hastert seconded. The motion carried with all ayes.
- 8. **Discuss/Approve Benefits Eligibility Clarification**. For the purposes of SWIPCO benefits a domestic partner would not be eligible for SWIPCO insurance policies. Administrative issues have complicated allowing domestic partners to be insurance eligible and it can be difficult determining relationships so we are proposing to drop domestic partners from eligibility. Our benefits liaison has advised that most companies have already done this. Struble moved to approve the eligibility changes. Miller seconded. The motion carried with all ayes.
- 9. Set Date for Annual Meeting. The Annual Meeting is typically in September and this will be our 50th Anniversary celebration. McCurdy proposed having the meeting this year in the evening to encourage more city and county representatives to attend. The proposed date is September 25, 2025, in Atlantic. Time to be set later. Struble moved to approve setting the date of the annual meeting as September 25, 2025. Crouch seconded. The motion carried with all ayes.
- 10. Public Comment Period. None.
- Board Sharing. Struble asked if business would be down with larger projects wrapping up. McCurdy said not necessarily, there will just be more on a smaller scale.
- 12. Other Business. None
- Adjourn. Miller moved to adjourn. Hastert seconded. The motion carried with all ayes. Chair Green adjourned the meeting at 2:04 p.m.