

Commonwealth Implements “PAYback” Website to Check Status and Refund Eligibility for Permit Applications

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On November 1, 2023, Pennsylvania Governor Josh Shapiro announced the release of “PAYback,” an online tool for Pennsylvania permit, license, and certification applicants. See [Press Release](#), Gov’r Josh Shapiro, “Governor Shapiro Launches First-in-the-Nation Online Money-Back Guarantee System to Bring Increased Accountability & Transparency to Commonwealth Permitting, Licensing, and Certification Processes” (Nov. 1, 2023). Specifically, PAYback allows an applicant to confirm the processing time of its application and request a refund if the application is not processed within the appropriate timeline. Refund eligibility applies to approximately 70% of applications, excluding those that, e.g., do not have an application fee. The refund policy is not retroactive and only applies to applications completed on or after November 1, 2023.

The PAYback tool is one component, and a result of Shapiro’s stated goal of increasing transparency, efficiency, and certainty for Pennsylvanians subject to these processes and requirements. Its development followed Shapiro’s issuance of [Executive Order 2023-07](#), “Building Efficiency in the Commonwealth’s Permitting, Licensing, and Certification Processes” (Jan. 31, 2023), which directed each applicable Executive Agency to “compile a catalog of the types of permits, licenses, or certifications it issues and submit that catalog to the Governor’s Office” within 90 days. *Id.* Relevant Executive Agencies were tasked with compiling the following information for each permit, license, or certification:

- type, term, and basis (e.g., statutory, regulatory, or other);
- method for receiving applications and when the method was last updated;
- legal authority governing the length of application processing times;
- applicable fees and the underlying authority for same;
- analysis and recommendation of the appropriate length of time to promptly process completed applications; and
- any other relevant information as requested.

In subsequent announcements, Governor Shapiro reported that (1) the Executive Agencies had completed their cataloging efforts, totaling more than 750 licenses, 800 permits, and 360 certifications, and that his office would review and establish efficient application processing times based on agency recommendations; and (2) from related efforts, many state agencies had reduced application backlogs or processing times for their respective applications. See [Press Release](#), Gov’r Josh Shapiro, “Shapiro Administration Announces All Commonwealth Agencies Take Critical Step in Improving Licensing, Permitting, and Certification Processes” (May 5, 2023); [Press Release](#), Gov’r Josh Shapiro, “Governor Shapiro Keeps Commitment to Improve Commonwealth’s Permitting, Licensing, and Certification Processes and Make Government Work Faster for Pennsylvanians” (Oct. 26, 2023). With the PAYback announcement, the Shapiro administration said that future goals include “filling key vacancies, updating the Commonwealth’s IT and technological assets, improving the application processes, and more.” November Press Release, *supra*. The PAYback tool and more information about it can be found on its [website](#).

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