



**Ministry of Financial Services, Trade & Industry and
Immigration**

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For Immediate Release:

Department of Immigration Launching Three Major Initiatives in the Coming Weeks

Cashless Service, Monarch House One-Stop-Shop, and Extended Stay Permit

Nassau, The Bahamas, October, 14th 2020– The Ministry of Financial Services, Trade & Industry and Immigration is launching a number of Immigration-related improvements as the Ministry works to realize the government’s agenda for improving the ease of doing business and accelerating the digital transformation of government services. Starting next week, the Department of Immigration will see the launch of its first-ever cashless payment platform, the roll out of the Extended Stay Permit Programme and the re-introduction of its Monarch House location as a one-stop-shop for services related to Citizenship and Permanent Residency.

Immigration’s Cashless Platform is the result of efforts by the Ministry to digitally transform processes and services throughout all of its departments, including the Financial Services Unit, the Trade Unit, and the Department of Immigration. The platform will allow applicants to pay for immigration-related services via an online portal or at third party sites. Certified cheque payments will also be available. The department has successfully overseen the soft launch of the platform for public testing this week with the full launch scheduled for Monday, October 19th.

Minister Responsible for Immigration, Hon. Elsworth Johnson, has stated that the digitization effort will provide much needed convenience to applicants using the system while also allowing for tighter controls and monitoring of transactions:

“We are dedicated to the continued modernization of all platforms throughout our Ministry. The Immigration Department has focused its resources on improving the efficiency of our systems and the conveniences offered to the public. I am certain that users of this new system will welcome these changes with open arms. All cashless transactions will now be traceable, providing for greater transparency in our processes and eliminating opportunities for anyone to circumvent the systems we have in place. This will help greatly with our zero-tolerance approach to corruption, as well as our accountability efforts.”

Those wishing to use the platform will need only an email address or a mobile phone to gain access. Upcoming updates to the platform include the ability for applicants to check the status of their application online (slated for December, 2020) and the ability to enroll for new and existing permits from the comfort of their homes or businesses (scheduled for the first quarter of 2021).

Accompanying the introduction of the Cashless Platform is the redevelopment of Immigration’s East Bay St. operation, Monarch House, as a one-stop-shop for all services by early November. The department’s Naturalization Unit, which has responsibility for matters related to Citizenship and Permanent Residence, has been completely revamped. In keeping with the government’s ease of doing business, mechanisms are currently being put in place to allow for the enrollment of applications. Minister Johnson believes that the evolution of the Monarch House operation was necessary to keep pace with changing times and the expectations of the general public and industry stakeholders:



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“Gone are the days of the public having to trek between Monarch House and our Hawkins Hill Headquarters to process different parts of their applications. The entire application process, from enrollment to collection of certificates and cards, will now be facilitated from Monarch House. Efficient delivery of services is key to achieving our objectives of modernization and improving the ease of doing business. It can also lead to important economic stimulus for those seeking permanent residency through investment. This has been an important issue for financial services industry stakeholders, and we are working to respond to their needs by implementing a new system and a new team ready to deliver on these objectives.”

Capping off a productive week for the Ministry of Financial Services, Trade & Industry and Immigration, will be the launch of the much-awaited Extended Stay Permit Programme on October 22nd. Originally suggested by the Economic Recovery Committee, the programme was devised as a remote study and work permit programme allowing foreign students enrolled in online courses and foreign remote workers to reside in The Bahamas.

“This innovative program, which has been fast-tracked by the government, makes The Bahamas one of the leading innovators in the strategic pursuit of the remote work and study market as the world contends with the global pandemic,” says Minister Johnson. “It not only creates a new revenue stream for the government through fees collected and taxes generated due to increased consumption and import of goods, but it also brings money into the private sector and stimulates business activity.”

Once launched, it is expected that the government will begin marketing the programme as an opportunity to work and study in “paradise” as a multi-ministry, multi-departmental effort.

Taken as a collective, the Ministry has positioned these changes as necessary adaptations to the “new normal” of COVID-19, which required solutions to the public health and economic challenges posed by the pandemic and also presented opportunities that the Ministry believes it has positioned itself to take advantage of for the good of the nation.

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The Ministry of Financial Services, Trade & Industry and Immigration is the entity responsible for providing vision, strategic direction, policy, and information related to the movement of financial resources, goods and people.

Our priorities are to protect, promote and grow the Bahamian financial services sector, to expand opportunities for Bahamians to engage in international trade, and to facilitate the authorised movement of people for the benefit of The Bahamas.