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# Bloomberg Plan Would Simplify Gun-Permits

By **AL BAKER**

The Bloomberg administration announced on Friday that it was moving to simplify the process for New Yorkers to obtain gun permits, thus speeding up a set of byzantine licensing requirements that gun-rights advocates have long criticized as among the most restrictive in the country.

Administration officials said that the move was forged by a City Hall focused on efficiency and that it would allow for better investigation of applicants who might not qualify for a gun while more swiftly satisfying those fit to have them.

But the timing of the decision was curious to some, as it follows a 2008 [Supreme Court](#) ruling that struck down parts of the gun-control law in the District of Columbia and subsequent challenges to gun laws in other places.

“If I were working for the mayor in New York, in the [legal department](#) particularly, I’d be saying: ‘Are we sure we can defend these laws? Are there things to do, ahead of time, that will make it easier for us to defend them?’” said [Paul Helmke](#), the president of the [Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence](#). “I would be surprised if that were not the thinking.”

The announcement was an unexpected turn for Mayor [Michael R. Bloomberg](#), who has made national headlines with his efforts to take guns out of criminals’ hands and stem their trafficking, like using private investigators to pose as gun buyers in sting operations and suing gun dealers in several states.

A spokesman for the mayor said on Friday that despite Mr. Bloomberg's continuing fight, he had never taken issue with legal gun ownership, a perspective that Colin Weaver, of [New Yorkers Against Gun Violence](#), said he was in sync with.

"The mayor is focused on crime control, not gun control," said the Bloomberg spokesman, Jason Post. "He has no problem with people who want to go hunting. The issue is illegal guns that are killing people and, all too often, police officers."

In New York, [the Police](#) Department issues licenses to possess handguns, rifles and shotguns in the city, and to carry them. The application process for a handgun is laid out on the department's Web site. To get a gun, applicants must go to 1 Police Plaza. The fee is \$340, not including a \$94.25 fingerprint-check fee. Weeks of waiting can follow. There is also a process for license renewal.

For a residential possession permit, applicants must demonstrate that they are not prohibited from gun ownership by having, for example, a history of domestic violence or arrest or conviction. These words on the Web site highlight just how subjective disapproval for a handgun is: "If your investigation results in a determination that you lack character and fitness for a license permit, your application will be denied."

For a permit to carry a gun, the bar is higher. The prospective gun owner must "show a need," said a police spokesman. An example might be a part-time security worker.

One change outlined on Friday is geared toward transparency by having the police "offer more detailed examples of eligibility standards for a permit, and make the additional examples available both in print and online," according to a news release from the mayor's office.

Other changes include speeding up reviews of applications, reducing how many in-person visits new applicants must make, expanding ways to pay for license renewals and opening the Police Department's licensing offices one evening a week. Also, at a time when other fees are rising or staying flat, one change calls for slashing fees for most renewal licenses, but Mr. Post said no specific amounts had been proposed. He said some fees might rise.

"This package will make New Yorkers safer," he said, adding that the city was not now facing any legal challenges to its licensing system.

Andrew Arulanandam, a spokesman for the [National Rifle Association](#), said that despite the Bloomberg administration's putting a streamlining effort in writing, history showed the city to be a place where "the only people who get licenses are the rich and famous." [Alan Gura](#), the lead counsel for the plaintiff in the 2008 case, [District of Columbia v. Heller](#), and a lawyer for residents of Chicago who are challenging its gun-control law, in [McDonald v. Chicago](#), said Mr. Bloomberg's move "sounds like progress."

Whether it will protect against legal challenges is unclear, said [Ilya Shapiro](#), a constitutional law scholar at the libertarian [Cato Institute](#). "If the underlying regulations make it hard for someone to qualify for owning a gun, then simplifying the process is an empty action."