

Modernizing Local Government Health Departments

Comprehensive eBook for Municipal & County Health Officials

2023



The Operating System for Local Government

Table of Contents

Summary	4
Chapter 1: Modern Challenges Public Health Directors Need to Consider & Overcome	5
Chapter 2: How Public Health Data Storage Works	9
Chapter 3: How to Perform Better Health Inspectionss	14

Summary

Modernizing local government health departments through the use of technology is becoming increasingly important in today's rapidly evolving healthcare landscape. Local health departments are responsible for protecting and promoting the health and well-being of their communities, and technology can help them achieve this goal more efficiently and effectively.

One area where technology can have a significant impact is in data storage and management. By using modern digital systems, health departments can collect, store, and analyze data more efficiently and accurately, allowing them to make better-informed decisions and track health trends more effectively.

Health departments can improve workflows and collaboration through government technology too. With the help of tools like electronic health records and telehealth, health professionals can work more closely and share information in real-time, leading to better outcomes for patients and the community at large.

In this comprehensive eBook, you'll learn more about the important technology changing the healthcare landscape, and how it can save your local government time and money with simplified data storage and automated government workflows.



Chapter 1: Modern Challenges Public Health Directors Need to Consider & Overcome

If there's a key takeaway from the COVID-19 pandemic, it's how integral local public health departments are to public safety. The pressure is increasingly on for local health departments to ensure the public remains as safe as possible from health threats; from providing critical health data to citizens and key state and federal officials, to managing on-site vaccinations and testing, to recruitment of relevant health officials.

The pandemic also shined a spotlight on the key areas in need of innovation in health department workflows. Fortunately, technology and advancements in health services workflows are available for advancing your health department and local public health infrastructure.

Here are tips to consider when strategic planning as a local health leader, and ways that technology can advance your department workflows to be faster and better organized.

What are the Key Responsibilities of a Public Health Director?

Public health directors are decision-makers in local health departments that determine how to allocate budgets to provide critical health services within their jurisdiction. Beyond strategic planning, these directors organize and oversee administrators, inspectors, tech workers, and other critical job roles involved in implementing public health services.

Tips for Public Health Directors to Innovate in the Health Department

If your local health department is still using all of the same workflows from before and during the pandemic, chances are your processes are antiquated and can be improved upon with [government technology](#).

Here are key ways that public health directors can better plan and manage public health services:

How Can Public Health Directors Improve Strategic Planning Processes?

You're the main decision maker about how budgets are to be allocated and which health services need to be prioritized.

Use hoards of health data collected and rapid health technology advancements in recent years, to make sure you're implanting health department dollars as efficiently as possible on the highest priority issues.

1. Hear From Voices Across the Department

The success of your day to day health service operations is dependent on clerical, technical, and medical employees at various leadership levels.



Public health directors need to speak with health department officials across roles is critical to identifying bottlenecks in the current workflows and health infrastructure. Doing so will be further affirmation on the key issues to prioritize in coming quarters and years. When performing [government employee performance reviews](#), be sure to inquire about what aspects of your department employees feel can be approved upon.

[How Can Governments Improve Organization-Wide Communications?](#) Here's what to know.

2. Analyze Macro and Micro Level Health Data

International, federal, state, and private sector health research has painted a clear picture about current public health priorities and challenges that became more evident at the height of the pandemic. Taking the time to assess data from all of these various resources will allow you to contextualize which issues pose the largest threats globally and the various strategies for fending off threats.

Use your [local government analytics](#) to make more localized decision-making around local health threats and services that matter most to public safety. Compare actual performance data of your health department against your [key performance indicators](#) to determine which focus areas would benefit from additional prioritization.

GovTip

Consider complaint management software to get insightful public health data right from your community-members. People can submit feedback & critiques about their experiences with getting vaccinated, accessing critical health department information, etc. for you to utilize when considering the public's perspective in your strategic planning. Here's a resource for [How to Best Use Complaint Management Software](#).

3. Assess Your Health Department Budget (and Consider Ways to Increase It)

Hopefully, city leaders like the city administrator in your community have come to recognize the critical importance in prioritizing the health department budget over the last few years. As a public health director, you need to adequately utilize the budget provided by your local government in ways that will have the most impact.

You also need to weigh your options for generating additional revenue for your local health department. Here are some common methods:

- **Collect fees for applications**

When businesses and citizens apply for things like [pet licenses](#), [health licenses](#), or [health inspections](#), your health department is entitled to collect a government fee for performing the service.

- **Collect fees for fines**

When local businesses aren't meeting health codes, they should incur fees for putting public health at risk. With various [credit card processing](#) integrations on GovPilot, you can collect [government fee and fine payments](#) right from your government website with online payments.

- **Consider public health grants**

Federal and state governments are investing in local health infrastructure. Look into key grants that are available from federal bills like the [American Rescue Plan](#) and [US Infrastructure Investments & Jobs Act](#) as well as state grants like the [NJDOH Public Health Infrastructure Grants](#) to give your budget a much-needed boost.

Digital Infrastructure Tips for Public Health Directors to Consider

Using government technology across workflows is an effective way for public health directors to maximize their budgets. It's a key reason that digital infrastructure is regularly highlighted in federal and state grants for local governments.

Here are key ways that you can use your budget to invest in [health department software](#) that saves time and money by automating workflows:

1. Digital Record Storage of Public Health Data

Government officials and citizens will have increased access to key government documentation by storing [public records in the cloud](#). Existing documents from the health department can be uploaded [to the government cloud](#), and all future documents will be automatically uploaded to the cloud and made accessible in real time.

Officials can track down health records in moments. Citizens can submit [open records requests](#) and receive critical paperwork via an automated email. Critical paperwork can be distributed within the department, with other departments, with state and federal officials, and with private-sector partners via a streamlined government communications channel.

Learn more about [the Benefits of Going Paperless in Local Government](#).

“GovPilot has streamlined the entire process and it is easier to keep track of the requests. The best part is no paper!”

Eileen Birch, RMC/CMC/Municipal Clerk
Union Township, New Jersey

2. Health Permit and License Applications on Your Government Website

Customized forms for various permit and license types can be added right to your [local government website](#). Generic health licenses as well as more specific license types like [retail food establishment licenses](#) can be submitted and approved virtually.

How Does Government Permitting Software Work?
Here's everything to know.

3. Digital Health Inspections

Make inspections more efficient by:

- Setting up automated scheduling notifications that let inspectors know when a new business is opening or an existing business needs a recurring health inspection
- [Health inspection forms](#) can be moved to a digital format and filled in [via a government mobile field device](#) like a tablet or cell phone.
- All inspection records are automatically stored and accessible via the cloud.

4. Property Records via GIS Map

All property records for an address can be pulled up in moments via a [local GIS map](#). Has a business previously failed a health inspection? Inspectors can refresh their memory to ensure code compliance is now being met. Have citizens and businesses applied for relevant permits and licenses? Health officials can check property records to confirm.

Learn more about the [Benefits of GIS Maps in Local Governance](#).

4. Automated Collection of Data That Can Be Pulled Into Intuitive Reports & Dashboards

With all of your records stored in the government cloud, data is automatically being collected around things like

- Which types of forms are being regularly filed?
- Where is [revenue being generated](#) for your health department?
- What are common reasons that local businesses are failing health inspections?
- How long is it taking to complete public health services?
- What are timelines looking like for public health infrastructure projects? Are they meeting anticipated deadlines?

Having all of this data at your fingertips will make it much easier to make informed decisions as a public health director.

Modern Public Health Director Strategy

Modern public health challenges require modern solutions. As a local leader in health service management, public health directors owe it to their citizens and staff alike to implement health department budgets in a way that makes processes more efficient and services stronger.

Health department digital infrastructure can transform every aspect of day to day operations for the better. Get started on implementing health software in your community by [booking a free demo](#).



Public Health Director FAQs

What Does a Public Health Director Do?

A public health director is the main person in-charge of the local health department. They build quarterly and annual strategic plans, prioritize which health services budgets are allocated towards, and lead health officials that handle clerical, IT, and medical processes.

How Does Government Technology Help the Local Health Department?

Public health directors can get more out of their budgets by using GovTech to automate tedious workflows. Health department technology can be used to:

- Digitally store all public health records in the cloud.
- Record health inspections via a phone or tablet.
- Offer digital health permit and license applications.
- Collect insightful data about public health services.
- Collect digital fees and fines to generate revenue for your health department.

What Should Public Health Directors Consider When Strategic Planning?

Public health directors have a lot of variables to consider when choosing how to spend their annual budgets. Here are considerations to include in your strategic planning:

- Which issues are most important to your health department employees? Which hurdles are they facing in their responsibilities?
- How can health services be more equitable for constituents of all backgrounds?
- What trends are apparent in macro and micro level data?
- Where is revenue being generated? How can more be made to increase budgets?

Chapter 2: How Public Health Data Storage Works

Local health departments have thousands of public health records to store, from business inspection notes to health licenses, and everything in between. Without the right approach to health department data storage, local health departments may face challenges with data privacy, unintended communication silos, or inefficient processes.

Additionally, as technology advances and the cloud expands, public health departments may need to capture and share large amounts of data from cloud-based devices, like wearable health trackers, exercise equipment, and applications used to run inspections, permits, and program enrollment.

Ensuring local health departments and their partners have access to quality public health data is paramount to strong public health responses, breaking down communication silos, and improving community health overall.

In this chapter, we'll cover what public health data storage looks like, some of the challenges with existing health data management systems, and the benefits of moving public health data storage to the cloud.

What is Public Health Data Storage?

Public health data storage refers to the collection, management, and preservation of public health records created by public health departments. Public health data storage, sometimes referred to as health data management, organizes digital health records and data. Modern storage technology provides vital tools for monitoring public health, identifying trends, and making decisions.

Local health departments collect various kinds of data, depending on the program, policy, or regulatory requirement. Types of government health data include health inspection reports, permits and licenses, claims, medical records, program enrollment data, vital records, infection rates, and more.

Public health data can be used by health departments and public health directors in a variety of ways, such as identifying barriers to care in a community, improving how health inspections are conducted, and identifying public health risks.



Challenges with Paper-Based, Legacy Public Health Data Storage Approaches

Many legacy public health data storage solutions are paper-based or housed in on-premise servers. Although a common practice for many local public health departments, legacy systems and paper-based methods come with a few challenges.

Storing public health data this way can introduce privacy and cybersecurity issues, communication silos, and inconsistent data standards. These challenges can also lead to decision-making without a complete understanding of a community's needs or public health issues.

Privacy and cybersecurity issues

Promoting and protecting the health and privacy of individuals and communities is critically important for local health departments. Paper-based public data storage approaches are susceptible to unauthorized access, damage, loss, and theft. There are few safeguards in place to prevent many of the threats associated with paper-based data storage.

Legacy on-premise servers are secure within network perimeters, but with remote work becoming the new normal, network perimeters are now expanding outside the bounds of on-premise server networks. Because of expanding workforce perimeters and attack surfaces, on-premise servers are now more susceptible to cyber threats than ever before.

Consider these [Local Government Cybersecurity Tips](#) and [Considerations for the Cloud vs. On-site Servers for Municipalities](#).

Communication silos

Paper-based data storage approaches can often lead to communication silos between departments and prevent

efficient data sharing between organizations. The steps involved to share paper-based data are also administratively burdensome. Storage of paper records is physically challenging in that it takes up a lot of space, and becomes difficult to search and find stored records quickly.

Similarly, on-premise legacy systems are typically harder to access without proper authorization. Granting access to on-premise servers requires significant paperwork and can take days or weeks to approve. Data silos force departments to work in isolation, leading to duplication of efforts, inefficient data sharing capabilities, short-sighted decision-making, and a lack of transparency between entities.

Learn more about [Modernizing Your Local Government Communications Strategy](#).

Inconsistent data standards

Data standards often vary between different local health departments and community health organizations. This inconsistency makes data sharing and analysis challenging, and can lead to ineffective decision-making.

If multiple organizations are tracking a metric using different data standards, analysis of this data becomes much more complex and time consuming. Using inconsistent data can also lead to inaccurate reporting and higher compliance risk.





Benefits of Moving Public Health Data Storage to the Cloud

1. Proven-Effective Cybersecurity

Cloud computing providers often use advanced security measures, like data encryption, to provide end-to-end protection of sensitive data. Cloud security is also a specialized field of cybersecurity focusing on securing cloud data against [government cyber threats and data breaches](#).

With GovPilot ensuring regular data backups and disaster recovery capabilities, storing public health data in the [government cloud](#) - via industry leading Microsoft Azure - ensures data is secure and can be quickly and easily restored in the event of a disaster or system failure.

Certain types of cyber threats, like insider threats, are also better identified and isolated in a cloud environment. Although human errors may still occur, cybersecurity teams have more advanced tools to address these errors quickly if data is stored in the cloud.

Here are [Cybersecurity Training Essentials to Teach Government Workers](#) to prevent a breach due to human error.

2. Increased efficiencies and streamlined workflows

As soon as health inspectors submit their field [health inspection reports](#), the data is automatically stored in the cloud and can be easily accessed from anywhere. This can speed up approval workflows and even the permitting process.

Storing public health data in the cloud not only benefits public health employees, but also businesses waiting for inspection updates or permit approvals. Everything from [open records requests](#) to collecting application fees and health violation fines is streamlined once public health data is stored in the cloud.

Learn more about [Online Government Fee & Fine Collection](#).

3. Access to data insights and dashboards

Embracing cloud-based [health department software](#) enables public health departments to access a full spectrum of data insights that can be used to improve programs, inform future budgets, create more accurate reports, and develop more effective policies.

Visualizing public health data can also uncover community health patterns or business shortcomings that were not previously visible, leading to improved decision-making and better outcomes. Tracking certain metrics, like permit release times or health inspection approval rates, are helpful to improve programs and business operations.

- [Government Analytics: Making Informed Decisions Using Government Data](#)
- [Setting and Monitoring Local Government Key Performance Indicators](#)

4. Improved data-sharing

Storing public health data in the cloud promotes better communication between multiple departments, leading to less overlap, better resource distribution, and everyone working on the same page. For instance, health inspection reports can easily be shared with other departments that might be involved in the approval process.

Cloud-based data storage also ensures better data-sharing between local health departments, healthcare providers and community-based healthcare organizations for better public health responses. In the event of a public health emergency, having the ability to share data between organizations is critically important to plan a concerted response.

Digital storage over paper is an important step towards [Sustainable Public Healthcare](#).



5. Ease of training

When public health data is readily available on the cloud, training new and existing staff becomes simpler and less resource intensive. Training can be done remotely with online training videos, tutorials, and webinars, which staff can access remotely at their own pace.

New data dashboards are easy to use and simple to learn, so staff can quickly adapt to the new system, gain access to data, and increase productivity.

Here's [How to Onboard and Train Public Officials on Government Software](#).

How Local Public Health Departments Can Go Digital

Moving public health data storage to the cloud is an important and necessary step for local public health departments to strengthen cybersecurity, increase data accessibility, and improve workflows.

Storing public health data in the cloud opens a new realm of possibility for health departments to improve public health responses, streamline the permitting and inspection process, and develop more effective policies. With data readily accessible in the cloud, local health departments can improve transparency and provide better service to the public.

The benefits of cloud-based data storage ensure that local public health departments can operate more efficiently and effectively, leading to better outcomes and improved public health.

To learn how GovPilot [government software](#) can help streamline the inspection and permitting processes for health departments, book a free demo.

Public Health Data Management FAQs

1. What is the Public Health Cloud?

The public health cloud is a [government data storage](#) method for local health departments to store critical public data. Documentation pertaining to health inspections, property records, [pet licenses](#), health testing, [animal control and impounding](#), etc. are all stored digitally and accessible from anywhere by relevant health officials.

2. Why Should Health Inspections Operate From the Government Cloud?

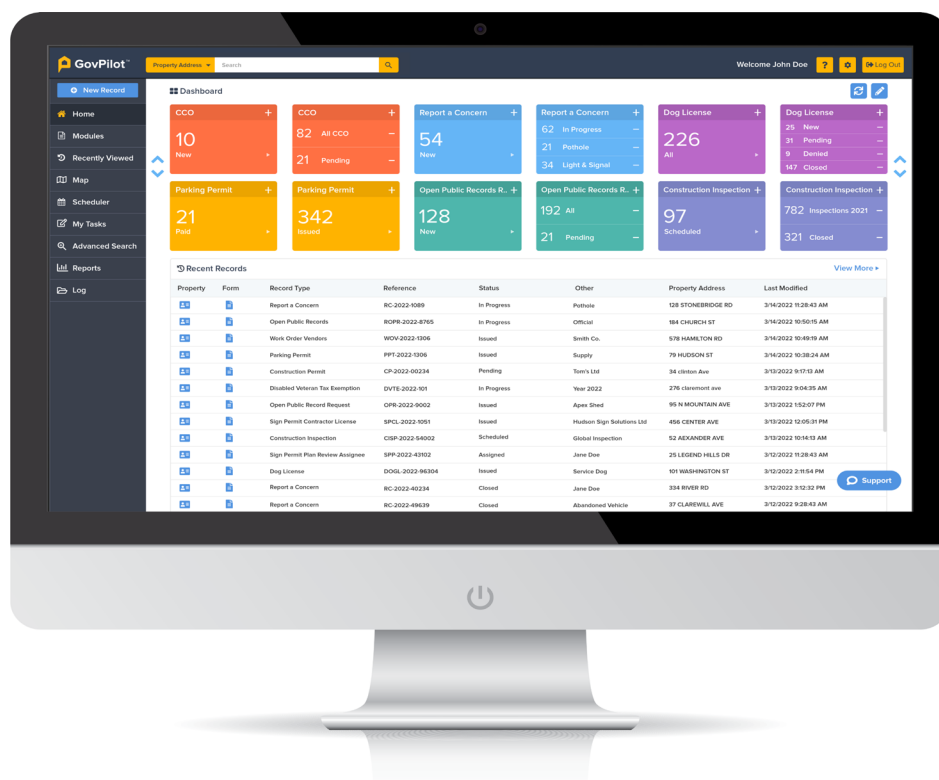
Even beyond the cybersecurity benefits that come with storing health data in the cloud, there are many other benefits to moving health inspections to a cloud-based capacity. Customizable forms can be created for various inspection types, from [retail food inspections](#) to [aquatic facility inspections](#) and beyond. These forms can be efficiently completed in the field using a [government mobile device](#), and will be made instantly accessible alongside relevant property records upon completion of the inspection. That saves your department time and money to be utilized elsewhere.

3. What are the Benefits of Health Department Software?

[Health department software](#) moves all public health data to the cloud for increased cybersecurity and accessibility. Additionally, online [health permit and licensing](#) applications will allow [citizen services](#) to be completed from your [government website](#). Health inspections can be completed via a phone or tablet. Insightful data can be collected across health workflows to make informed decisions in the health department.

4. What is Public Health Data Management?

Public health data management is the process of storing key data in the local health department. Traditionally, health data was stored using physical paper or physical, on-site servers. In more recent memory, many local health departments have moved to the cloud as a means for more cyber secure health data management and automated storage of and access to health records like permits, licenses, and inspection forms as soon as they are filed.



Chapter 3: How to Perform Better Health Inspections

When it comes to local health inspections, ensuring that establishments and facilities meet local, state, and health standards is vital to protecting your citizens' health. Yet, for many local health departments, inspections are inefficient and underperformed, allowing for health code violations to slip through the cracks.

There are many key considerations your local government is legally required to include in inspection processes to ensure foodborne illnesses aren't spread. Here's everything local health departments need to know about health inspections and how government technology can help.

Why Are Health Inspections Critical to Local Public Health?

Keeping facilities cleanly and safe is essential to maintaining high-quality local public health. Your local government can hold local businesses accountable by assessing the ways in which they do business and making sure they abide by local and national code standards.

Doing so will ensure that both your local citizens as well as business employees are safe and not exposed to anything toxic in their food, water, or air.

Failure of governments to properly manage health inspections and hold local businesses accountable could result in unsanitary and unsafe conditions for your citizens.

How Does [Health Department Technology](#) Help With Health Inspections??

Here are key ways that [government software](#) can assist in health inspection processes:

1. [Digital Health Inspection Forms & Data Storage](#)

Digital health inspections make it easy for inspectors to take notes from a mobile field device like a phone or tablet with customizable forms for various facility types.

Whenever an inspection is completed, the records are automatically stored in the cloud and made accessible alongside the full set of property records for the establishment at hand. All relevant government officials can then access the inspection forms in a few clicks via a property search functionality or by pulling the address up on a [localized GIS map](#).

Inspection forms and all essential health department data can be stored in the [government cloud](#). Learn more about [Local Government Data Storage](#).

2. [Streamlined Scheduling of Health Inspections](#)

Whenever a new business registers for a [health permit / license](#), or an annual inspection date is approaching for an established business, health inspectors can get automated notifications about needing to schedule a date and time to inspect a facility.

Save time with better scheduling processes, and ensure accountability of health inspectors so that facility inspections don't fall through the cracks. Doing so will ensure that businesses maintain [code compliance requirements](#) and citizens are safe, while business owners and operators receive updated licenses in a timely manner.

[How Can Governments Encourage Staff Accountability?](#)

Here are additional considerations for your health department and entire locality.

3. Online Health Permit Applications

Government software allows your local government to make all permit and licensing forms accessible from your [government website](#).

Encourage new business owners to register online. Once their application is submitted and a health inspection takes place, your local government can approve or deny the application digitally and notify the business owner of their application status. Automated submission of inspection certification can be sent to business-owners as well.

Learn more about [How Digital Permitting Works?](#)

4. Online Inspection Requests

Giving businesses the option to schedule relevant inspections themselves is an effective means for streamlining inspection scheduling processes while building stronger [private-public sector partnerships](#).

With GovPilot, any local business owner can go online to register for relevant health inspections in their industry!

5. Insightful Health Data for Your Local Government

Both the health department and critical decision-makers in other [local government departments](#) can use critical data collected about local businesses to make informed

strategic planning decisions.

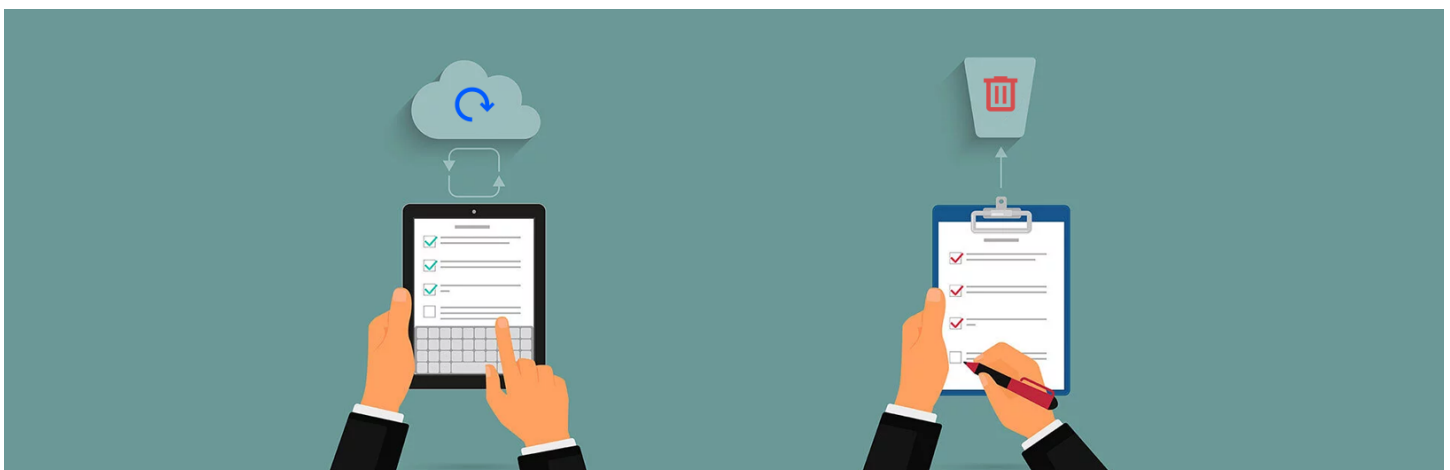
- *Are certain aspects of your processes resulting in businesses not passing their inspections? Identify trends and work with local businesses to address these issues.*
- *Which businesses are generating revenue for your local government? Which application fees are generating funds for your health department? See financial trends and invest in economic development in various sectors.*

Modernizing Your Local Health Inspections

Most Americans are eating out at least several days a week. Your local government owes it to your citizens to ensure that they're safe when breathing in the air or utilizing local facilities

Going digital is an effective way to improve your health inspection processes and departmental efficiency. With automated notification of upcoming inspection deadlines, time-saving digital inspection forms, and instant storage of critical inspection files in the cloud, your local government can complete inspections faster and more accurately.

Learn more about how you can embrace [health inspection technology](#) for inspections and beyond with GovPilot.





The Operating System for Local Government

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GovPilot - named a GovTech 100 company for six consecutive years - is the leader in digital transformation for local governments. GovPilot's cloud-based platform was built with the sole purpose of enabling local governments to operate at their full potential by standardizing, digitizing, and unifying more than 100 operational and constituent service processes on one system.

To learn more visit www.govpilot.com. Follow @GovPilot on LinkedIn and Twitter.

