

Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City, Metro Manila

SIXTEENTH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 3494



Introduced by **HON. RENE L. RELAMPAGOS**
First District, Bohol

EXPLANATORY NOTE

As an instrument of accountability and transparency, the 1987 Philippine Constitution affirmed that, "the right of the people to information on matters of public concern shall be recognized."¹

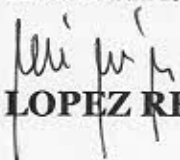
More than being available, however, the information must be in a language that is easy to understand by the people. Plain language uses clear and simple language and aims at making the reader understand as quickly and as completely as possible the document on hand.

Government, thus, must initiate and institutionalize the use of clear, concise and simple language in all government communications free of verbosity, obscurity and complexities. Many times have we seen a waste of money, time and energy with erroneous entries to various application forms in government agencies for the simple reason that the data required was not clear to the intended user. This, at times, prevents them from availing the benefit of public services due to difficulty in understanding government information. Further, many government documents are perceived to intentionally deceive, thus, foster distrust and animosity.

Several countries,² including the United States of America,³ have adopted the use of plain language in all government documents.

This proposed measure will make *mandatory*, as against being merely directive or optional, the use of plain language in all government documents to ensure fulfilment of the Constitutional commitment of the "right of the people to information." This will also conserve money, time and energy, expedite procedures as well as raise accountability and transparency in all government transactions and communications.

In view of the foregoing, the passage of the instant bill is earnestly sought.


RENE LOPEZ RELAMPAGOS

¹ Section 7, Article III, 1987 Philippine Constitution

² Sweden uses 'plain language' for thirty years and South Africa's Constitution is in plain language and requires plain language

³ The Congress of the United States of America just recently passed its "Plain Writing Act of 2010" (HR 946) which was signed into law by its President on October 13, 2010

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AN ACT
TO ENHANCE CITIZEN ACCESS TO GOVERNMENT INFORMATION
AND SERVICES BY ESTABLISHING THAT GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS
ISSUED TO THE PUBLIC MUST BE WRITTEN CLEARLY, AND FOR
OTHER PURPOSES.

Be it enacted by the Senate and the House of Representatives of the Philippines in Congress assembled:

SECTION 1. Title. This Act shall be known as the "Plain Language Law of 2013."

SEC. 2. Purpose. The purpose of this Act is to improve the effectiveness and accountability of Government agencies to the public by promoting clear Government communication that the public can understand and use.

SEC. 3. Definition of Terms. As used in this Act:

- a. "Government Agency" – shall refer to the Government of the Republic of the Philippines, all its agencies and instrumentalities, national and local, including government-owned and controlled corporations.
- b. "Covered document" – is any document that
 - i. is necessary for obtaining any benefit or service from the Government or filing taxes;
 - ii. provides information about any benefit or service from the Government;
 - iii. explains to the public how to comply with a requirement the Government administers or enforces;
 - iv. includes (whether in paper or electronic form) a letter, publication, form, notice or instruction; and
 - v. does not include a regulation.
- c. "Plain writing" – means writing in Filipino or English that is clear, concise, well-organized, and follows other best practices appropriate to the subject or field and intended audience.

SEC. 4. Responsibilities of Government Agencies. Not later than nine (9) months after the enactment of this Act, the head of each agency or local government unit shall:

- a. designate one (1) or more senior officials, not lower than an Undersecretary level position, within the agency to oversee the agency implementation of this Act;
- b. communicate the requirements of this Act to the officials and employees of the agency;
- c. ensure training of all officials and employees of the agency in plain writing;
- d. establish a process for overseeing and monitoring the ongoing compliance of the agency with the requirements of this Act;
- e. create and maintain a plain writing section of the agency's website as required under paragraph (2) that is accessible from the homepage of the agency's website; and
- f. designate one (1) or more agency points-of-contact to receive and respond to public input on agency implementation of this Act and the agency reports required under Section 7.

SEC. 5. Requirement to Use Plain Writing in New Documents. Beginning not later than one (1) year after the date of enactment of this Act, each agency shall use plain writing in every covered document of the agency that the agency issues or substantially revises.

SEC. 6. Role of the Civil Service Commission.

- a. The Civil Service Commission (CSC) shall be the Focal Agency to oversee implementation of this Act. As such Focal Agency, the CSC shall ensure that each Government Agency shall comply with the provisions of this Act.
- b. Not later than six (6) months after the date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary of the Civil Service Commission (CSC) shall develop and issue guidance on implementing the requirements of Section 4. The Secretary shall consult with relevant government agencies and may create interagency working groups to assist in developing and issuing the implementing rules and regulations.

SEC. 7. Reports to Congress.

- a. Initial Report – Not later than nine (9) months after the date of enactment of this Act, the head of each agency shall publish on the plain writing section of the agency's website a report that describes the agency plan for compliance with the requirements of this Act.
- b. Annual Compliance Report – Not later than eighteen (18) months after the date of enactment of this Act, and annually thereafter, the head of each agency shall publish on the plain writing section of the agency's website a report on agency compliance with the requirements of this Act.

SEC. 8. Separability Clause. – The provisions of this Act are declared separable and in the event of any such provision is declared unconstitutional, the other provisions, which are not affected, shall remain in force and effect.

SEC. 9. Repealing Clause. – All other laws, decrees, rules and regulations or parts thereof which are inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are repealed, amended or modified accordingly.

SEC. 10. Effectivity. – This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in the Official Gazette or in at least two (2) national newspapers of general circulation.

Approved,