

Republic of the Philippines
House of Representatives
Quezon City

SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS
Second Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 7888



INTRODUCED BY REPRESENTATIVE ALFRED VARGAS

EXPLANATORY NOTE

Public service is among the primary mandates of the government. This is considered the visible side of and the most common way to experience governance.¹ As such, it is an important responsibility of the State to ensure that public services are delivered efficiently to those who need it. However, ordinary citizens are often faced with public notices or instructions written in a confusing manner or in a language they are not fluent in. This causes delays and additional costs in transacting with the government. Worse, citizens may not be able to fully understand and avail of the public services intended for them.

This bill thus seeks to address these problems in the public services of national agencies and local government units. First, it would mandate the use of plain language in all their communications and in the implementation of their basic functions, mandates, and services. Second, it shall require the attachment of versions of its public notices, instruction, and issuances in the language or dialect predominantly used in the locality or specifically used by the intended community.

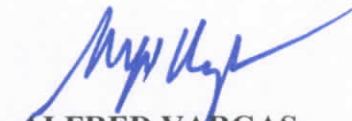
This measure would greatly improve the effective delivery of public services to those who need it and aids the government in achieving its mandate. For example, the Department of Revenue of Revenue in Washington D.C., U.S.A. launched in 2003 an initiative wherein customer letters were rewritten into plain language. It resulted in an additional \$5 million dollar increase in taxes collected because of the use of clearer directions and more easily understood forms.²

¹ Asian Development Bank, "Good Governance Delivers Pro-Poor Public Services," June 5, 2015, <https://www.adb.org/news/features/good-governance-delivers-pro-poor-public-services>

² Madeline O'Phelan, "The Importance of Plain Language in the Public Sector," *Granicus*, June 7, 2016, <https://granicus.com/blog/importance-plain-language-public-sector/>

The use of plain language and translations in public services ensures that instructions and notices are communicated in the shortest time possible and most, if not all, of the intended beneficiaries or clients are able to understand such.³ Moreover, this promotes transparency and trust in the government by providing information of public interest which any citizen can assess and evaluate.⁴

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



ALFRED VARGAS

³ "Why use plain language?" *plainlanguage.gov*, <https://www.plainlanguage.gov/about/benefits/>

⁴ "Communicating Effectively in Public Service," Institute for Local Government, <http://www.ca-ilg.org/post/communicating-effectively-public-service>

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AN ACT

TO ENHANCE CITIZENS' ACCESS TO GOVERNMENT INFORMATION AND SERVICES BY ESTABLISHING A SYSTEM IN WHICH GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS ISSUED TO THE PUBLIC MUST BE WRITTEN IN PLAIN LANGUAGE AND TRANSLATED TO THE LOCAL LANGUAGE OR DIALECTS IF NECESSARY, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

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

Section 1. Short Title – This Act shall be known as the “Plain Writing for Public Service Act of 2016”.

Section 2. Objectives. – The purpose of this Act is to improve the effectiveness and accountability of government agencies to the public by promoting clear government communication that citizens can understand and use.

Section 3. Definition of Terms. – For the purposes of this Act, these terms are defined as follows:

- (a) “Plain Writing” refers to writing and preparations thereof that are clear, concise, well-organized, and follows other best practices appropriate to the subject or field and intended audience or constituents;
- (b) “Language” refers to the words, spelling, pronunciation, sentence construction, and the methods of combining them as used and understood by a community;
- (c) “Dialect” refers to the form of a language that is used in a particular part or region of a country or a particular group of people;
- (d) “Government agencies” refer to all government departments, bureaus, divisions, attached agencies, and government owned- and controlled corporations;

Section 4. *Plain Writing in Public Service.* – All government agencies and local government units are hereby mandated to adopt Plain Writing in all their communications and in the implementation of their basic functions, mandates, and services.

Section 5. *Translation to Local Languages or Dialects.* – All government agencies and local government units are likewise mandated to translate to the predominant language or dialect all communications and implementation of their basic functions, mandates, and services. If a specific communication is made to a particular locality or group of people with a different language or dialect than the predominant language or dialect then the former should be used.

Section 6. *Coverage.* – The use of plain language and translation shall be made including, but not limited to, the following documents:

- (a) Information about any government benefit or service;
- (b) Documents necessary for obtaining any government benefit or service or filing taxes;
- (c) Documents that explain to the public how to comply with a requirement which government agencies administer, enforce, and provide;
- (d) Other letters, forms, instructions, notices, and publications issued to the public.

Section 7. *Civil Service Commission.* – The Civil Service Commission (CSC) shall be the main agency tasked to oversee the implementation of this Act. Within sixty (60) days of the effectivity of this Act, the CSC shall formulate and issue the rules and regulations for its effective implementation.

The CSC shall create a Section on Plain Writing which shall develop and issue guidance or guidelines in implementing the requirements of this Act. The said Section shall be allowed to consult and partner with a relevant academic institution and/or organization in the development and issuance of relevant guidelines. The CSC shall in consultation with other government offices and relevant organizations shall issue the implementing rules and regulations to implement the provisions.

The guidelines must contain the following details:

(a) General Rules

- (i) Each agency shall designate one (1) or more official within the agency to be the point-person for the implementation of this Act.
- (ii) Each agency shall communicate the requirements of this Act to the employees of the agency.
- (iii) Each agency shall train employees of government agencies in Plain Writing;
- (iv) Each agency shall establish a process for overseeing the compliance of the agencies with the requirements of this Act.

(b) Websites

- (i) All government agencies are mandated to adopt a system of Plain Writing in their websites or relevant portals.

- (ii) The plain writing section described under Section 3(a) shall inform the public of agency compliance with the requirements of this Act; and
- (iii) The plain writing section shall contain a mechanism for the agency to receive and respond to public input on agency implementation of this Act.

Section 8. *Compliance.* – All government agencies are mandated to report and publish in their respective websites or publications a report on their agency's compliance with the requirements of this Act.

Section 9. *Allocation.* – The amount of ten million pesos (P10,000,000.00) is hereby appropriated for the Plain Writing Section of the Civil Service Commission. The CSC shall be allotted the needed appropriation to implement the provisions of this Act.

Section 10. *Effectivity.* – This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in at least two (2) newspapers of general circulation.

Approved,