

NINETEENTH CONGRESS OF THE)
REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES)
Second Regular Session)

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

House Bill No. 9158



Introduced by REPRESENTATIVES LANI MERCADO-REVILLA,
BRYAN B. REVILLA AND RAMON JOLO REVILLA III

AN ACT
TO ENCHANCE CITIZENS' ACCESS TO GOVERNMENT INFORMATION AND SERVICES BY REQUIRING ALL GOVERNMENT OFFICES TO ADOPT PLAIN LANGUAGE IN ALL ITS WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS TO THE PUBLIC, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

EXPLANATORY NOTE

In the United States, the move towards a more responsive, accessible, and understandable government communication with the public can be traced back to 1998 when President Bill Clinton issued "Memorandum on Plain Language in Government Writing", directed towards executive department and agency heads.¹ An initiative then emerged from the Washington Department of Revenue, which, in 2003, undertook the task of rewriting 250 customer letters in plain language within a year. This effort led to an impressive outcome, generating an additional \$5 million in state taxes the following year, attributable to clearer instructions and user-friendly forms for taxpayers.²

The necessity of plain writing was underscored by President Barack Obama in 2009 when he envisioned a government founded on principles of transparency, public participation, and collaboration, as articulated in his "Memorandum on Transparency and Open Government."³ Consequently, on October 13, 2010, President Obama signed into law Public Law 111-274, otherwise known as the "Plain Writing Act of 2010" on October 13, 2010.⁴ Since its enactment, federal agencies have reaped substantial benefits, including increased compliance rates, reduced customer service inquiries, and improved customer satisfaction scores.⁵ Documents written in plain language are inherently less complex and, therefore, more accessible to all, including those with limited literacy skills.

¹ Memorandum on Plain Language in Government Writing (1998). Retrieved September 12, 2023, from <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/WCPD-1998-06-08/pdf/WCPD-1998-06-08-Pg1010.pdf>.

² The Importance of Plain Language in the Public Sector. (n.d.). *Granicus*. August 23, 2023, <https://granicus.com/blog/importance-plain-language-public-sector/>

³ Final Guidance on Implementing the Plain Writing Act of 2010 (2011). Retrieved September 12, 2023, from <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/omb/memoranda/2011/m11-15.pdf>.

⁴ [Public Law 111-274], An Act to Enhance Citizen Access to Government Information and Services by Establishing the Government Documents Issued to the Public Must be Written Clearly, and For Other Purposes (2010). Retrieved August 23, 2023, from <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PLAW-111publ274/pdf/PLAW-111publ274.pdf>.

⁵ Center for Plain Language. (2020, October 12). Happy 10th Anniversary Plain Writing Act. <https://centerforplainlanguage.org/happy-10th-anniversary-plain-writing-act/>

With the introduction of this bill, we aspire to realize similar benefits. This proposed measure aligns with the fundamental principles enshrined in our Constitution, notably in Article 2: “The State recognizes the vital role of communication and information in nation-building” (Section 24); and “Subject to reasonable conditions prescribed by law, the State adopts and implements a policy of full public disclosure of all its transactions involving public interest” (Section 28).

Numerous versions of this proposed measure have been presented in our Congress over the years.⁶ We express our gratitude to those who preceded us, recognizing the importance of empowering the public with informed choices, access to their entitlements, and the fulfilment of their legal obligations.

What distinguishes this proposed version from its predecessors is the inclusion of the Anti-Red Tape Authority among the agencies that the Civil Service Commission is mandated to collaborate with in implementing this Act. Our belief rests on the correlation between red tape and the clarity of public information. Enhancing the transparency and accessibility of information can significantly reduce bureaucratic hurdles. Moreover, in addition to requiring compliance reports, we propose to recognize individuals and government offices consistently excelling in plain language communication. This initiative aims to foster cooperation and further the effective implementation of the Act’s objectives.

Lastly, we propose the short title, “Communication and Language Effectiveness for Accessible and Responsive (CLEAR) Government Act”, reflecting our aspiration for a CLEAR government, clear in its communications and responsive to its citizens’ needs.

In light of the foregoing, we earnestly seek the approval of this bill.



REP. LANI MERCADO-REVILLA
2nd District of Cavite



REP. BRYAN B. REVILLA
AGIMAT Partylist



REP. RAMON JOLO REVILLA III
1st District of Cavite

⁶ Among others: House Bill No. 2156 (2016), introduced by Reps. Enrico Pineda, and Michael Romero; House Bill Nos. 7888 (2018) and 3624 (2019), introduced by Rep. Alfred Vargas; House Bill No. 5465 (2022), introduced by Rep. Ernesto Dionisio, Jr.; House Bill No. 5418 (2022), introduced by Rep. Patrick Vargas; Senate Bill No. 3138 (2009), introduced by Sen. Miriam Defensor Santiago; Senate Bill No. 714 (2022), introduced by Senator Grace Poe; Senate Bill No. 273 (2022), introduced by Sen. Manuel “Lito” M. Lapid.

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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 “Communication and Language Effectiveness for Accessible and Responsive (CLEAR) Government Act”.

SECTION 2. *Declaration of Policy.* – It is hereby declared the policy of the State to promote a more responsive, accessible, and understandable government in its communications with the public, in accordance with the right of the people to information on matters of public concern under the 1987 Constitution. Towards this end, the state shall present information about government policies, programs and services in a manner that is clear, objective and simple, and presented in a manner that is readily understandable.

SECTION 3. *Definition of Terms.* – As used in this Act, the following terms are defined as follows:

- (a) *Plain Language* - Communication is considered in plain language when its choice of words, organization, and presentation are clear and uncomplicated that the intended readers can effortlessly locate the information they need, understand what they find, and use that information. Achieving plain language does not mean leaving out critical information; instead, it is aligned with the objectives of laws and policies.
- (b) *Government Office* – This refers to departments, agencies, including local government units, government-owned or controlled corporations and other government instrumentalities, whether located in the Philippines or abroad.

SECTION 4. *Plain Language Requirement.* – In pursuit of effective public engagement and understanding, all government offices shall adopt the use of plain language in English, Filipino and/or other regional languages or dialects, as may be deemed necessary, for all written communications to the public issued on or after the effectivity of this Act, including, but not limited to:

- (a) Advisories
- (b) Notices
- (c) Announcements
- (d) Bulletins
- (e) Forms and other papers for the application, request or enjoyment of a public service, right, privilege, benefit, license, clearance, permits, among others
- (f) The agency's citizen's charter
- (g) Documents detailing and explaining a government program, activity or project;
- (h) Replies and responses to an inquiry or request for assistance or information; and
- (i) Contents presented on websites or other pertinent electronic platforms.

In the same way, government offices shall review and revise communications pertaining to policies, programs and services still in effect to align with plain language standards.

SECTION 5. *Plain Language Officers.* – All government offices shall designate at least one or more individuals within the office whose responsibilities include:

- (a) Dissemination of the requirements of this Act to all employees;
- (b) Training employees in plain writing;
- (c) Informing the public of the office's compliance with the requirements of this Act;
- (d) Seeking feedback from the public to continually improve the clarity and effectiveness of communications; and
- (e) Establishing a mechanism for the office to comply with this Act.

SECTION 6. *Role of the Civil Service Commission and Other Agencies.* – The Civil Service Commission (CSC) shall oversee the implementation of this Act. This oversight shall involve collaboration with the Anti-Red Tape Authority (ARTA), as well as the Governance Commission for GOCCs (GCG), Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG), Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino (KWF), and the Philippine Information Agency (PIA), among others.

SECTION 7. *Compliance Report.* – All government offices shall be obligated to document and disclose on their official website and in a conspicuous space accessible to the public within their office premises, a report on its continuing compliance with the Act, to be updated every three (3) months.

Additionally, the CSC shall submit to the Oversight Committee of Congress an annual report on its compliance with, or accomplishments under this Act, together with its plans and recommendations to improve and develop its capability to enforce the provisions of this Act.

SECTION 8. *Recognition for Compliance.* – Government offices that consistently excel in their plain language communications shall be recognized by the CSC.

Similarly, government offices concerned should consider using incentives to encourage greater use of plain writing.

SECTION 9. *Implementing Rules and Regulations.* – Within sixty (60) days from the approval of this Act, the CSC, in coordination with the ARTA, GCG, DILG, KWF, PIA, and other persons or organizations deemed appropriate, shall issue the necessary rules and regulations for the proper implementation of this Act.

SECTION 10. *Separability Clause.* – If any provision of this Act shall be declared invalid or unconstitutional, such declaration shall not affect the validity of the remaining provisions of this Act.

SECTION 11. *Repealing Clause.* – All provisions of laws, presidential decrees, letters of instruction and other presidential issuances which are incompatible or inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are hereby deemed amended or repealed accordingly.

SECTION 12. *Effectivity.* – This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in the Official Gazette or in two (2) newspapers of general circulation.

Approved,