

TWENTIETH CONGRESS OF THE)
REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES)
First Regular Session)

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

House Bill No. 5033



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

AN ACT
REQUIRING ALL GOVERNMENT OFFICES TO ADOPT PLAIN LANGUAGE IN ALL
COMMUNICATIONS TO THE PUBLIC TO ENHANCE CITIZENS' ACCESS TO
GOVERNMENT INFORMATION AND SERVICES, AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS
THEREFOR

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 the “Memorandum on Plain Language in Government Writing”, directed to executive departments and agency heads.¹ A noteworthy initiative followed in 2003, led by the Washington Department of Revenue, which revised 250 customer letters into plain language within a year. This effort yielded impressive results, generating an additional \$5 million in state taxes the following year, attributed to clearer instructions and user-friendly forms for taxpayers.²

The importance of plain writing was underscored by President Barack Obama in 2009 through his “Memorandum on Transparency and Open Government,” which called for a government rooted in transparency, public participation, and collaboration.³ This vision culminated in the enactment of the “Plain Writing Act of 2010” (Public Law 111-274) on October 13, 2010,⁴ which has since led to measurable improvements across federal agencies, including higher compliance rates, reduced customer service inquiries, and increased public satisfaction.⁵ Plain language documents are inherently less complex, therefore, more accessible to all, including individuals 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 seek to achieve similar outcomes. This proposed measure upholds key constitutional principles, particularly those found in Article II: “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).

Over the years, several versions of this proposal have been introduced in Congress.⁶ We express our gratitude to those who preceded us, recognizing the value of empowering the public with clear information – enabling them to make informed decisions, access their entitlements, and fulfill their obligations under the law.

During the 19th Congress, our version stood out for mandating the inclusion of the Anti-Red Tape Authority as a partner agency of the Civil Service Commission in the implementation of this Act. This reflects our belief in the connection between bureaucratic inefficiencies and unclear public information. Improving the clarity and accessibility of government communication is a key strategy in reducing red tape. Moreover, aside from compliance reporting, we introduced a provision to recognize individuals and agencies that consistently excel in plain language communication, encouraging collaboration and sustained commitment to the goals of the Act.

These provisions were integrated into the Committee on Public Information’s deliberations during the 19th Congress. Our proposed measure for the 20th Congress builds upon that version, and now stands as its updated iteration at the committee level.

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.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

HOUSE BILL NO. 5033

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

AN ACT
REQUIRING ALL GOVERNMENT OFFICES TO ADOPT PLAIN LANGUAGE IN ALL
COMMUNICATIONS TO THE PUBLIC TO ENHANCE CITIZENS’ ACCESS TO
GOVERNMENT INFORMATION AND SERVICES, AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS
THEREFOR

*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 Language in
Government Communications Act”.

SEC. 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, simple, and understandable.

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

- (a) *Plain Language* refers to a communication whose wording, structure, and
design is so clear that the intended readers can easily find what they need,
understand what they find, and use that information; and
- (b) *Government Office* refers to departments, agencies, including local
government units, government-owned or controlled corporations, and other
government instrumentalities, whether located in the Philippines or abroad.

SEC. 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 local languages, as may be deemed

necessary, for all 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, and 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;
- (i) Contents presented on websites or other pertinent electronic platforms; and
- (j) Other letters, forms, instructions, notices, and publications issued to the public.

Government offices shall review and revise communications pertaining to policies, programs, and services still in effect to align with plain language standards.

SEC. 5. *Role of the Civil Service Commission and Other Agencies.* – The Civil Service Commission (CSC), in cooperation with the Anti-Red Tape Authority (ARTA), the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG), the Governance Commission for Government Owned or Controlled Corporations (GCG), the Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino (KWF), the Philippine Information Agency (PIA), and other government offices and relevant organizations, shall oversee the implementation of this Act.

The CSC shall create a Unit on Plain Language which shall develop and issue guidelines in implementing the requirements of this Act. The said Unit shall be allowed to consult and partner with relevant academic institutions and organizations in the development and issuance of relevant guidelines.

The guidelines must contain the following details:

(a) General Rules

- (1) Each agency shall designate one (1) or more officials within the agency to be the point person for the implementation of this Act;
- (2) Each agency shall train employees of government agencies in Plain Language; and
- (3) Each agency shall establish a process for overseeing the compliance of the agencies with the requirements of this Act.

(b) Websites

- (1) All government agencies are mandated to adopt a system of Plain Language in their websites or relevant portals;
- (2) The website's plain language section shall inform the public of the agency's compliance with the requirements of this Act; and

(3) The website shall contain a mechanism for the agency to receive and respond to public input on the agency's implementation of this Act.

SEC. 6. *Training and Capacity-Building* – The CSC and GCG, in collaboration with higher education institutions (HEIs), shall regularly conduct trainings, seminars and other similar capacity-building activities for the offices and agencies covered by this Act. For plain language in Filipino and other local languages, the KWF shall be tapped to facilitate the necessary capacity-building activities.

SEC. 7. *Report on Compliance*. – The CSC shall submit a report to Congress on the status of implementation and compliance with this Act two years after its effectivity and every year thereafter. All government agencies are mandated to report and publish on their respective websites or publications a report on their agency's compliance within the same period.

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

Government offices may use incentives to encourage greater use of plain language in their respective agencies.

SEC. 9. *Appropriations*. – The departments, agencies, instrumentalities, bureaus, offices, and government-owned and controlled corporations charged with carrying out the provisions of this Act shall include in their respective programs its implementation, the funding of which shall be included in the General Appropriations Act.

SEC. 10. *Implementing Rules and Regulations*. – Within ninety (90) days from the approval of this Act, the CSC, in coordination with the ARTA, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), the DILG, the GCG, the KWF, the PIA, and other relevant government agencies and organizations, as may be deemed necessary, shall issue the necessary rules and regulations for the proper implementation of this Act.

SEC. 11. *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.

SEC. 12. *Repealing Clause*. – All laws, presidential decrees, executive orders, proclamations, rules and regulations, or any part thereof, which are inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are hereby repealed or modified accordingly.

SEC. 13. *Effectivity*. – This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in the *Official Gazette* or in at least two (2) newspapers of general circulation.

Approved,