

Republic of the Philippines
House of Representatives
Quezon City, Metro Manila

NINETEENTH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

House Bill No. **5418**



INTRODUCED BY REP. PM VARGAS

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

EXPLANATORY NOTE

The 1987 Philippine Constitution highlights the important role of public information and communication:

Section 24, Article II states that: "The State recognizes the vital role of communication and information in nation-building."

Section 7, Article III states that: "The right of the people to information on matters of public concern shall be recognized. Access to official records, and to documents and papers pertaining to official acts, transactions, or decisions, as well as to government research data used as basis for policy development, shall be afforded the citizen, subject to such limitations as may be provided by law"

The strength of a nation is determined by how well-informed its general public is. People who are equipped with the right knowledge through a transparent government are better capable of making decisions as they are aware of and comprehend the laws, rules, and regulations.

In many government agencies however, communications are not always as comprehensible to ordinary citizens who so mostly deserve to understand and use the information.

Often, instructions and guidelines are written in a language that they are not fluent in leading to delay and additional cost when transacting with the government.

This bill seeks to address this communication problem by proposing a measure that will ensure that public or government communications, especially those in written form, are easily understood by its end-users.

By ensuring that information is presented in a simple, concise and plain language, the government provides the public service the citizens deserve as it allows them access to the services as well as guarantee transparency in most of its transactions. Using plain language in public documents gives citizens access to the public knowledge and thereby readily allows them to participate in the democratic process of the government.

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



REP. PM VARGAS

Fifth District, Quezon City

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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 “Plain Language for Public Service Act”.

SECTION 2. Objectives. – The purpose of this Act is to improve the accessibility and effectiveness of government agencies to the public by promoting clear government communication that citizens can understand and use. This shall also enhance the transparency and accountability, geared towards good governance, of government agencies to the public.

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

- a) “Plain Language” also known as “Plain Writing” refers to communication 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” refers to all government departments, bureaus, divisions, attached agencies, and government owned-and controlled corporations;

SECTION 4. Plain Language for Public Service. – All government agencies and local government units are hereby mandated to adopt Plain Language 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 that 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:

1. Information about any government benefit or services;
2. Documents necessary for obtaining any government benefit or service or filing taxes;
3. Documents that explain to the public how to comply with a requirement the government agencies administer, enforce, and provide;
4. Other letters, forms, instructions, notices, and publications issued to the public.

SECTION 7. Role of the Civil Service Commission. – The Civil Service Commission (CSC) shall be the main agency tasked to oversee the implementation of this Act.

The CSC shall create a Unit on Plain Language which shall develop and issue guidance or guidelines in implementing the requirements of this Act. The said Unit shall be allowed to consult and partner with the relevant academic institutions 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 train employees of government agencies in Plain Language;

(iii) 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 Language in their websites or relevant portals.

(ii) The plain language 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. *Training and Capacity-Building.* – The CSC shall regularly conduct trainings, seminars, and other similar capacity-building activities for the offices and agencies covered by this Act. For plain language and translation in Filipino and other regional dialects, the Komisyon ng Wikang Filipino (KWF) shall be tapped to facilitate the necessary capacity-building activities.

SECTION 9. *Report on 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 within one year after the effectivity of this Act and two (2) years thereafter. The CSC shall also submit a report to Congress on the status of implementation and compliance with this Act.

SECTION 10. *Implementing Rules and Regulations.* – Within sixty (60) days from the approval of this Act, the Civil Service Commission (CSC), in coordination with other relevant government agencies and stakeholders, shall issue the necessary rules and regulations for the proper implementation of this Act.

SECTION 11. *Separability Clause.* - If any provision of this Act is held invalid or unconstitutional, the same shall not affect the validity and effectivity of the other provisions hereof.

SECTION 12. *Repealing Clause.* - All laws, decrees, orders, and issuances, or portions thereof, which are inconsistent with the provisions of this Act, are hereby repealed, amended or modified accordingly.

SECTION 13. *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,