

111TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 946

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.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

FEBRUARY 10, 2009

Mr. BRALEY of Iowa introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform

A BILL

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.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Plain Language Act
5 of 2009”.

6 **SEC. 2. PURPOSE.**

7 The purpose of this Act is to improve the effective-
8 ness and accountability of Federal agencies to the public

1 by promoting clear Government communication that the
2 public can understand and use.

3 **SEC. 3. DEFINITIONS.**

4 In this Act:

5 (1) AGENCY.—The term “agency” means an
6 Executive agency, as defined under section 105 of
7 title 5, United States Code.

8 (2) COVERED DOCUMENT.—The term “covered
9 document” means any document (other than a regu-
10 lation) issued by an agency to the public, including
11 documents and other text released in electronic
12 form.

13 (3) PLAIN LANGUAGE.—The term “plain lan-
14 guage” means language that the intended audience
15 can readily understand and use because that lan-
16 guage is clear, concise, well-organized, and follows
17 other best practices of plain language writing.

18 **SEC. 4. RESPONSIBILITIES OF FEDERAL AGENCIES.**

19 (a) REQUIREMENT TO USE PLAIN LANGUAGE IN
20 NEW DOCUMENTS.—Not later than 1 year after the date
21 of enactment of this Act, each agency shall use plain lan-
22 guage in any covered document of the agency issued or
23 substantially revised.

24 (b) GUIDANCE.—

25 (1) IN GENERAL.—

1 (A) DEVELOPMENT.—Not later than 6
2 months after the date of enactment of this Act,
3 the Director of the Office of Management and
4 Budget shall develop guidance on implementing
5 the requirements of subsection (a).

6 (B) ISSUANCE.—The Director of the Office
7 of Management and Budget shall issue the
8 guidance developed under subparagraph (A) to
9 agencies as a circular.

10 (2) INTERIM GUIDANCE.—Before the issuance
11 of guidance under paragraph (1), agencies may fol-
12 low the guidance of—

13 (A) the writing guidelines developed by the
14 Plain Language Action and Information Net-
15 work; or

16 (B) guidance provided by the head of the
17 agency that is consistent with the guidelines re-
18 ferred to under subparagraph (A).

19 **SEC. 5. REPORTS TO CONGRESS.**

20 (a) INITIAL REPORT.—Not later than 6 months after
21 the date of enactment of this Act, the head of each agency
22 shall submit to the Committee on Homeland Security and
23 Governmental Affairs of the Senate and the Committee
24 on Oversight and Government Reform of the House of

1 Representatives a report that describes how the agency in-
2 tends to meet the following objectives:

3 (1) Communicating the requirements of this
4 Act to agency employees.

5 (2) Training agency employees to write in plain
6 language.

7 (3) Meeting the requirement under section 4(a).

8 (4) Ensuring ongoing compliance with the re-
9 quirements of this Act.

10 (5) Designating a senior official to be respon-
11 sible for implementing the requirements of this Act.

12 (6) Using, to the extent practicable and appro-
13 priate, plain language in regulations promulgated by
14 the agency.

15 (b) ANNUAL AND OTHER REPORTS.—

16 (1) AGENCY REPORTS.—

17 (A) IN GENERAL.—The head of each agen-
18 cy shall submit reports on compliance with this
19 Act to the Office of Management and Budget.

20 (B) SUBMISSION DATES.—The Office of
21 Management and Budget shall notify each
22 agency of the date each report under subpara-
23 graph (A) is required for submission to enable
24 the Office of Management and Budget to meet
25 the requirements of paragraph (2).

1 (2) REPORTS TO CONGRESS.—The Director of
2 the Office of Management and Budget shall review
3 agency reports submitted under paragraph (1) using
4 the guidance issued under section 4(b)(1)(B) and
5 submit a report on the progress of agencies to the
6 Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental
7 Affairs of the Senate and the Committee on Over-
8 sight and Government Reform of Representatives—
9 (A) annually for the first 2 years after the
10 date of enactment of this Act; and
11 (B) once every 3 years thereafter.

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