



CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET OFFICE COST ESTIMATE

April 3, 2009

S. 574 **Plain Writing Act of 2009**

*As ordered reported by the Senate Committee on Homeland Security
and Governmental Affairs on April 1, 2009*

S. 574 would amend federal law to require all federal agencies within one year to use plain writing (clear, concise, well-organized, and readily identifiable to the intended reader) in all documents except for regulations. The legislation also would require the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to provide government-wide guidance on this matter. Finally, S. 574 would require each agency to designate a coordinator to review its compliance with the legislation, train employees to use plain language, and prepare reports to the Congress on compliance with the legislation.

CBO estimates that implementing S. 574 would cost about \$3 million a year for agencies to provide additional employee training and prepare reports for the Congress, subject to the availability of appropriated funds. The bill could also affect direct spending by agencies not funded through annual appropriations, such as the Tennessee Valley Authority and the Bonneville Power Administration. CBO estimates, however, that any net increase in spending by those agencies would not be significant.

Most provisions of the bill would codify and expand current practices of the federal government. Executive Order 12866 and the Presidential Memorandum on Plain Language (June 1, 1998) currently require government agencies to write in language that is comprehensible to readers. In addition, current laws such as the Paperwork Reduction Act, requires information collection forms to be “written using plain, coherent, and unambiguous terminology.” Based on information from OMB, CBO estimates that implementing this bill would not significantly increase the cost of preparing various paper or electronic documents used throughout the government.

S. 574 contains no intergovernmental or private-sector mandates as defined in the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act and would not affect the budgets of state, local, or tribal governments.

The CBO staff contact for this estimate is Matthew Pickford. This estimate was approved by Theresa Gullo, Deputy Assistant Director for Budget Analysis.