



H.R. 3548 – PLAIN LANGUAGE IN GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATIONS ACT OF 2007

FLOOR SITUATION

H.R. 3548 is being considered on the floor under suspension of the rules and will require a two-thirds majority vote for passage. This legislation was introduced by Representative Bruce Braley (D-IA) on September 17, 2007. The House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform approved the bill, as amended, by voice vote on March 13, 2008.

H.R. 3548 is expected to be considered on the floor of the House on April 14, 2008.

SUMMARY

H.R. 3548 requires federal agencies to use concise and well organized plain language in any public document that explains how to obtain a benefit or service. These documents include letters, publications, forms, notices and instructions. The legislation does not require that regulations be written in plain language except 'when possible'.

In using plain language, agencies may use the Plain English Handbook, published by the Social Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), or the Federal Plain Language Guidelines. An agency may also use its own plain language guidelines, as long as they are consistent with the Federal Plain Language Guidelines. The legislation requires that agencies use plain language in any new document created after H.R. 3548 is enacted, and in any revisions of previously issued documents.

Within six months of this bill's enactment, each agency must submit a report to Congress detailing how they intend on meeting the plain language requirements. For the first two years after H.R. 3548 has been enacted, each agency must submit an annual report to Congress on their compliance. After two years, each agency is required to submit a compliance report once every three years.

Additionally, the bill requires the Comptroller General to evaluate existing plain language guidance resources and to provide plain language and best practices guidelines to Congress as well as to the Office of Management and Budget within six months of enactment.

BACKGROUND

In June of 1998, the Clinton Administration issued a memorandum requiring the use of plain language in all new government documents other than regulations by January 1, 1999. The memorandum said that plain language documents should use everyday words, the active voice, and short sentences that use "you" and other pronouns.

The Plain English Handbook is published by the SEC, and helps individuals to write clear and informative disclosure documents using well-established writing techniques. The Federal Plain Language Guidelines is a writing resource developed by the Plain Language Action and Information Network to help the employees of federal agencies to improve their plain language writing.

[SEC Plain English Handbook](#)

[Plain Language Government Website](#)

COST

The Congressional Budget Office, "estimates that implementing H.R. 3548 would cost up to \$2 million a year for agencies to implement the additional employee training and reporting requirements."



LEGISLATIVE DIGEST

HOUSE REPUBLICAN CONFERENCE | CHAIRMAN ADAM PUTNAM

1420 LONGWORTH HOB, WASHINGTON, DC 20515

www.GOP.gov

PHONE 202.225.5107

FAX 202.226.0154

[CBO estimate for H.R. 3548](#)

STAFF CONTACT

For questions or further information contact Justin Hanson at (202) 226-2302.