



Center for Plain Language
MAKE IT CLEAR.

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Legislative Testimony

Date: March 5, 2024

To: Members of the committee

From: Center for Plain Language

Subject: Plain-language consultation

Dear Committee Members,

Since helping to pass the Plain Writing Act of 2010, the [Center for Plain Language](https://centerforplainlanguage.org/) (<https://centerforplainlanguage.org/>) has been recognized nationally and internationally for its plain-language expertise and mission of advancing plain language. Plain language is critical to ensuring that everyone has equal access to information and that they can act on that information in their daily lives. Of course, this concept applies to medical debt and debt collection, garnishment, and consumer finance.

On behalf of the Center, we appreciate that this bill requires the important step of plain-language consultation. This step is far too often overlooked in the document-development process. The Center is a nonprofit with no full-time paid staff. While we have limited capacity in plain-language consultation, we would like to contribute to revising garnishment forms and notices into plain language. We also have some suggestions on how to improve the legislation.

Revise the definition of plain language

The Center appreciates the definition of plain language (section 47, paragraph (e)), but we recommend amending the bill to recognize the international definition of plain language, one that thousands of experts recognize and which has been codified in an international standard, ISO 24495-1:

For purposes of this section, “plain language” refers to communication in which the wording, structure, and design are so clear that the intended readers can easily:

- (1) find what they need;
- (2) understand what they find; and
- (3) use what they find to meet their needs.

The current definition in the bill describes plain-language components, not what plain language is. We also recognize that *Minnesota Statutes* contains over 40 separate references to plain language, with disparate definitions. We encourage the Minnesota Legislature to set a single plain-language definition and standard to ensure consistency in expectations and implementation, and to ensure that the definition matches the industry’s agreed-upon definition.

Don’t forget document design

Document design, or how a document looks, is an oft neglected but necessary aspect of plain language. A material can be written in plain language, but if it is poorly designed—lacking clear headers, organization, predictable white space, or readable fonts—a reader cannot be expected to easily find, understand, and use the information. Document design is an important plain-language component, and the bill should specifically highlight the importance of document design in plain language.

Center consultation

We want to emphasize the cadre of members that support the Center and help advance our plain-language mission. Many of these members are plain-language consultants that help companies and governments revise material into plain language. If the bill is enacted, we would gladly provide high-level consultation and review, but our public-service capacity is ill-suited for large-scale, extensive projects. Our members are ready to step in and provide detailed plain-language expertise.

Conclusion

Everyone has a basic right to understand and navigate the debt process. But currently, this right is threatened. The Center for Plain Language is excited that the Minnesota Legislature recognizes that plain language is a significant part of the solution to solving this problem.

Sincerely,



Barbra Kingsley, PhD

Chair

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