



Submission
of the
National Disabled Students'
Association
on
The Plain Language Bill

Contact
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To	Governance and Administration Select Committee
From	National Disabled Students' Association (NDSA)
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Subject	Plain Language Bill

1. Introduction

1.1 The National Disabled Students' Association ("NDSA") is pleased to be able to make a submission on this important kaupapa. As a relatively new association, we look forward to being able to bring disabled students' voices to the table. We wish to thank the Governance and Administration Select Committee for taking submissions on this important legislation.

1.2 NDSA defines disability as a "diverse and complex phenomenon, which reflects the interaction between an individual's impairment and the barriers of their environment. This includes, but is not limited to, physical impairment, mental health and psychological conditions, learning and/or sensory forms of impairment, neurodiversity, chronic illness, individuals within the Deaf community, etc".

1.3 This submission should also be read with an intersectional lens. NDSA knows that the issues facing disabled students are strongly felt by migrants, refugees and international students for whom English may not be their first language. Therefore, NDSA holds that the Plain Language Bill engages universal design; this legislation will create more equitable outcomes for members of all of the mentioned communities and identities intersecting between.

1.4 NDSA makes this submission in support of the Plain Language Bill. Our association holds that this legislation will help the government and its agencies deliver better outcomes for the diverse people of Aotearoa New Zealand.

Specifically, the Plain Language Bill will:

- support equity for accessing essential information
- Ease the burden of disabled person's advocacy
- Create more transparent and accountable agencies, strengthening government relations with the disabled community.

2. Background

2.1. The National Disabled Students' Association is the representative body for disabled tauira in Aotearoa. We were established in 2021 in response to the poor outcomes disabled people face in tertiary education, exacerbated by COVID19. As a nonpartisan national body, we aim to challenge the collective barriers facing tauira within the tertiary space.

2.2. NDSA is still building its membership. While we build our local members, we aim to diligently represent the disabled student population to the best of our ability. We do this through discussion with disabled learners, disabled persons' organisations, and other national student associations. Our current standing members are:

- Victoria University Disabled Students' Association (VDSA)
- Otago University Disabled Students' Association (ODSA)
- Disability Union at AUT
- Waikato University Disabled Students' Association (UoWDSA)
- Weltec/Whitireia Disability Rep
- University of Canterbury Disabled Students' Association (UCDSA)

2.2. In addition to our formal members, we have connections with informal disabled learner community groups and networks such as at Massey University, Auckland University, and throughout the Te Pukenga network.

3. Support equity for accessing essential information

3.1. Everyone who lives and works in Aotearoa gets essential information from the government. Citizens have a democratic right to be able to understand this information. Accessible information is vital for members of the disabled community to understand their rights and duties under the law. Plain language in government communications means information is easier for the disabled community to understand and act on — it's written with the reader in mind.

3.2. Plain language supports accessibility because it works well with assistive devices and is easier to translate. NDSA asserts that a commitment to plain language will encourage respectful, inclusive language and better upholds that mana of everyone in Aotearoa.

3.3. Plain language means using language that people understand. By removing jargon, complex language, and unnecessary technical terms from government communication, With the passing of this legislation, government agencies can act more transparently and can be better held to account. Clear and straightforward writing will create the trust essential to government agencies building stronger relationships with the disabled community and its intersections. A relationship that NDSA holds is currently lacking.

4. Plain language will ease the burden of disabled peoples advocacy

4.1. Plain language is clear, concise, and answers all the readers' likely questions. When government agencies use plain language in all communication, people will find it easier to understand and act on the information they receive.

4.2. NDSA holds that the passing of the Plain Language Bill will ease the burden on disabled people to advocate and understand services, benefits, tax, and compliance. Concurrently, this will reduce the agency's time spent in communications and issues being escalated for clarification.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Ultimately NDSA supports the Plain language bill for the legislation's ability to increase accessibility, inclusivity, and efficiency in government communications.

Cumulatively, NDSA sees this legislation's potential to aid the relationship building between central government and the disabled community. Our association concludes this on the basis that plain language is capable of building trust in government agencies as disabled people are granted their democratic right to accessible information.

5.2. NDSA would like to thank you for reading this submission, and invite you to reach out to us for further kōrero on this subject.