



National Disabled Students' Association

Submission in opposition to the Plain Language Act Repeal Bill

Preface

The National Disabled Students' Association is an incorporated society made up of members from tertiary education institutions from across Aotearoa. We are a member-led organisation, collecting and representing the voices of disabled learners from universities, Te Pūkenga, private training establishments, and Wānanga, working together towards more accessible education experiences for learners.

As a part of our mahi, we try to use plain language, acknowledging this is the best, most effective means of making sure learners know their rights and where to go for support. We strongly support the government doing the same, with plain language being an important tool in allowing people to partake in democratic process and government-provided initiatives, along with accessing entitlements and support. A common way businesses, agencies, and other organisations can do this is by designating specialists in disability and plain language to oversee publications — an important step introduced by the government with the Plain Language Act 2022.

Our submission

In Aotearoa New Zealand, around 17-24% of people experience disability of some form. Only [13% of New Zealanders](#) have high literacy skills, and [disabled people are twice as likely](#) to lack school qualifications than non-disabled individuals, affecting our ability to access and understand information. We believe it is a fundamental **human right** that **all people** should be able to access information provided by the government and its agencies in a language that they can understand, and that disabled people should be **enabled** to understand changes affecting them. This is an essential part of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), particularly [Article 21 - Freedom of expression and opinion, and access to information](#), for which the Plain Language Act 2022 plays an important role. The [New Zealand Disability Strategy 2016](#) further emphasises the use of accessible language under Outcome 5: accessibility — *“Information and communications are easy for us to access in formats and languages that are right for*



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*us, including in our country's official languages of Te Reo Māori and New Zealand Sign Language. This helps us to be independent because we do not have to rely on other people", and "Disabled people are **consulted** on and **actively involved** in the development and implementation of legislation and policies concerning housing (home ownership, social housing and private rentals), transport (public and private), public buildings and spaces and information, communication and technology".*

We are very concerned about the current Plain Language Act Repeal Bill, which we believe will impact disabled people's ability to access information that affects them. Additionally, this Bill will impact individuals across Aotearoa regardless of their disability status, particularly as Aotearoa has low literacy rates, and a large number of people for whom English is a second language. For the D/deaf community, written English is also often a second language, and plain language increases the accessibility of information to this community (although it is not a substitute for NZSL translation). We feel it sets a **dangerous precedent** for the government to determine **who does, and does not get to participate in democratic processes**. Additionally, disabled individuals are significantly more likely to have interactions with, and be reliant on, services provided by reporting agencies, and we feel this Bill would decrease their ability to access services they are entitled to. Individuals who understand what is required of them are also more likely to comply with those requirements, which will ultimately save agencies time and costs of enforcement.

We do not feel there is enough accountability for reporting agencies to provide accessible information without this Act, and we believe that repealing this Act will have detrimental consequences for people across the motu. We frequently see the argument that "everyone is responsible for [efforts relating to disabled people]" during the disestablishment of services resulting in individuals having unmet needs, as a lack of disabled expertise means disabled people are often not considered where they need to be. We believe that it is an **efficient, effective** use of funding to ensure people are able to access important information provided by reporting agencies, and that disabled people should be **invested in**, to enable our participation in society and changes that affect us.



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We believe this Bill should **not** be passed, and that the Plain Language Act 2022 should remain in force, bettering the experiences of disabled and non-disabled people in Aotearoa. **Access to information** is a **human right**, and this Act enables that right to be enforced.

In conclusion, we **do not** support the Plain Language Act Repeal Bill, and we believe that the current Plain Language Act 2022 is an important part of making sure all New Zealanders have access to information affecting them. We welcome collaboration from the government with disabled organisations on ways in which processes may be made more efficient, while still meeting the needs of disabled individuals.

Ngā mihi nui,

Eloise Fleming and Nikita Van Dijk
2025 Co-Presidents of the National Disabled Students' Association –
NDSA

