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Plain Writing Plan

Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency



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Plain Writing Plan

Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency

The Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency for the District of Columbia (CSOSA) was created by Congress through the National Capital Revitalization and Self-Government Improvement Act of 1997. CSOSA was certified as an independent executive branch agency in August 2000, after successfully completing an initial period of trusteeship.

CSOSA supervises individuals on probation, parole, and supervised release in the District of Columbia. The agency's mission is to increase public safety, prevent crime, reduce recidivism, and support the fair administration of justice. In pursuit of this mission, CSOSA is guided by the principles of community, accountability, and justice.

The agency recognizes the importance of clear communication in all aspects of its work, and, most especially, in fostering and maintaining the partnerships necessary to realize its objectives. CSOSA is committed to the goals of the Plain Writing Act of 2010 and will continue promoting the use of plain writing by ensuring all of the Agency's communications are written in a manner that the public can easily understand and use.

I. About This Document

The [Plain Writing Act of 2010 \(H.R. 946, Pub. Law 111-274\)](#) was passed “to improve the effectiveness and accountability of Federal agencies to the public by promoting clear Government communication that the public can understand and use.” According to Section 3, Paragraph 3 of the Act, “[t]he term ‘plain writing’ means writing that is clear, concise, well-organized, and follows other best practices appropriate to the subject or field and intended audience.”

This document details CSOSA's efforts to comply with the Act, which requires agencies to “publish on the plain writing section of the agency's website a report that describes the agency plan for compliance with the requirements” of the Act. We are currently in the process of revamping our website, so this document will be included on the Plain Writing page of the new website.

Our intended audiences for this document are the public, Congress, and CSOSA employees. The sections below mirror the requirements of the Act.

II. Senior Official for Plain Writing

The Plain Writing Act requires us to designate at least one Senior Official for Plain Writing to oversee the implementation of the Act at the agency. We have designated:

Michen M. Tah, Esq. | Management Analyst
Office of Legislative, Intergovernmental, and Public Affairs
Email: michen.tah@csosa.gov | Phone: (202) 220-5318

III. Communication with Employees

The Act mandates that we “communicate the requirements of this Act to the employees of the Agency.”

Michen Tah, Management Analyst and Senior Official for Plain Writing, sent an agency-wide email that includes this report to all employees. Additionally, this report has been placed on our internal website (the “Intranet”). Furthermore, upon completion of our external website, this report will be included in the Plain Writing section of the website.

Finally, we inform all new employees about the Act during New Employee Orientation or during our Community Supervision Officer Academy.

IV. Training

As mentioned in the previous section, we inform all new agency employees about the Plain Writing Act during New Employee Orientation or during the Community Supervision Officer Academy. The Community Supervision Officer Academy is mandatory for all incoming Community Supervision Officers. The New Employee Orientation is mandatory for all other incoming agency employees.

In addition to this initial exposure to the Act, all agency employees have access to various writing- and communication-related trainings. More than 30 writing or communications training opportunities¹ have been offered to employees since 2008, not including those previously mentioned as part of mandatory training. We plan to continue these course offerings.

The Agency also plans on providing additional Plain Writing training opportunities to staff, particularly those who write content for external audiences. The Plain Language Action and Information Network, the organization that has led the government-wide movement for clearer communication, offers a free half-day introduction to plain language for federal agencies training. Moreover, other federal agencies – like the Federal Aviation Administration and the National Institutes of Health – offer their plain writing training online for free.

V. Ongoing Compliance

CSOSA is in the midst of a year-long Strategic Communications Project. The purpose of this project is to develop and implement a systemic and systematic approach to internal and external communications. We believe that several aspects of our Strategic Communications efforts will help with our ongoing compliance with the Plain Writing Act.

First, we hired a Management Analyst in our Office of Legislative, Intergovernmental, and Public Affairs, whose primary responsibilities include our agency’s external communications – social media, website, and fact sheets. We have issued guidance to staff who make presentation to people outside of the agency to ensure compliance with plain writing principles. We also plan to increase our use of infographics to reach a broader group of people with more varied literacy levels.

Second, our new website will be more readable, user friendly, aesthetically appealing, and engaging. We want to make sure that people can easily navigate through our website to find the information they want or need.

¹ Course titles include: The Plain Writing Act (during New Employee Orientation); Writing Clear and Concise Policies and Procedures; Writing Essentials; and Advanced Writing Skills.

Beyond the structure of the site, we also plan to revise all the content to be better aligned with plain writing best practices.

Finally, by the end of the Strategic Communications Project, we will have a comprehensive, systemic plan that governs all internal and external agency communication. The Strategic Communications Project will conclude by September 30, 2017.

VI. Website

By September 30, 2017, we will re-launch our website, which will include a plain writing page. The page will provide information on our compliance with the Plain Writing Act and efforts to improve communication with the public, some helpful hints on improving writing, links to this plan, and future reports. This will be our primary method for engaging the public on plain writing.

In addition to an agency-wide email, we will include plain writing information on our secure Intranet site for our staff.

VII. Reports

A. Initial Report

This Plain Writing Plan constitutes the initial report required by the Plain Writing Act.

B. Annual Compliance Report.

Pursuant to the Act, compliance reports are due annually. In our annual compliance report, we will include a current list of Plain Language contacts within the agency and list specific communications we have released that are in accordance with Plain Writing guidelines. We will also list the ways we have informed agency staff of the Act's requirements, describe training efforts, and highlight the ways in which we plan to stay in compliance and sustain change. Finally, the annual compliance report will include a link to our agency's plain writing page of the website as well as feedback from customers who have encountered our plain writing communications.

VIII. Conclusion

Our agency's guiding principles are community, accountability, and justice. Working with other federal agencies, local government agencies, community- and faith-based organizations, and the community at large is integral to the work that we do. Clear communication with all of these partners is a necessary part of collaboration, and collaboration is vital to accomplishing our agency's mission.