

# **Submission on the Plain Language Act Repeal Bill**

**From:** Kāpiti Community Action Group (CAG) Facilitated by the Foundation for Equity and Research New Zealand (FERNZ)

**Date:** 13 May 2025

## **Comments**

### **1. Plain language is a right, not a preference**

Every person in Aotearoa has the right to understand government information. The Plain Language Act 2022 helps make this possible by requiring agencies to communicate in ways that are clear, inclusive, and accessible.

### **2. Repealing the Act shifts the burden onto communities**

Without this law, people especially those who are disabled, Deaf, or who face language barriers will have to work harder to interpret complex documents. This increases dependence on others and undermines mana and autonomy.

*"They cant do that it will make it harder for people to understand. "* Kāpiti CAG member

### **3. Government communication is often inaccessible**

Government documents often use formal, complex, or technical language. This creates barriers to understanding and participation. Plain language helps ensure that everyone including Deaf and disabled people can access and engage with important public information.

*We cant easily look up or understand high-level language its too hard. But plain language lets us participate equally and stay informed. We don t want the Plain Language Act to be repealed.*

*Please don t take it away. We value it. Plain language makes a difference it needs to stay.*

Summary of a comment from a Deaf Kāpiti CAG member

### **4. Plain language builds trust and inclusion**

Using plain language shows respect. It tells people that their understanding matters.

It helps foster dignity, belonging, and confidence in government.

### **5. Plain language benefits everyone**

While it is especially important for disabled people, plain language helps all New Zealanders including older people, migrants, people with limited literacy, and anyone who is overwhelmed or time-poor.

### **6. Repealing the Act removes accountability**

The Plain Language Act provides a structure for improving communication. If repealed, there will be no guarantee that agencies will keep using clear, accessible language.

## 7. Repealing the Act undermines Aotearoa's obligations under the UNCRPD

Aotearoa New Zealand has ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), which requires governments to ensure that information is accessible to disabled people on an equal basis with others.

- **Article 9 (Accessibility)** obliges the government to take appropriate measures to ensure access to information and communications, including technologies and systems.
- **Article 21 (Freedom of Expression and Access to Information)** requires public information to be made available in accessible formats, using modes of communication appropriate to different kinds of disabilities including plain language.

Plain language is part of accessible communication. Repealing the Plain Language Act risks breaching these obligations by removing the structure and accountability that help ensure government communications are understandable and inclusive.

## Recommendations

- Retain the Plain Language Act 2022.  
The Act supports inclusion, equity, and good public service. It should not be repealed.
- Ensure government agencies remain accountable for accessible communication.  
Standards should remain in place to guide and assess agencies' communication practices.
- Recognise plain language as a tool for equity.  
Treat it as essential, not optional especially in a diverse society where many people experience barriers to understanding.
- Uphold Aotearoa's obligations under the UNCRPD.  
Government must ensure that public information is accessible and understandable for all disabled people, in line with Articles 9 and 21 of the Convention.