



The State of Maryland

Executive Department

EXECUTIVE ORDER
01.01.2024.25

Maryland Plain Language Initiative

- WHEREAS, The State of Maryland is committed to creating an accessible, inclusive government that all Marylanders can easily access and to removing barriers that prevent engagement with government and access to public services;
- WHEREAS, A consistent barrier to accessing government is ineffective communication; thus, State agencies must use more effective means of communication to ensure all Marylanders have equal access to government and equal opportunities to engage with government;
- WHEREAS, A State agency's use of communication methods that are easy to use and understand helps remove barriers so that all Marylanders can access government services and support;
- WHEREAS, The right to communication access is reflected through protections enshrined in the Americans with Disabilities Act, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and Section 1557 of the Affordable Care Act of 2010;
- WHEREAS, Communication access also is protected by the Plain Writing Act of 2010, which requires federal agencies use clear communication that the public can understand and use;
- WHEREAS, Communicating in plain language, such that the audience can find what they need, understand what they find the first time they read or hear it, and use what they find to meet their needs, is an important tool for removing barriers to government and allowing people to access government independently;
- WHEREAS, Maryland law already requires the translation of written communication into other languages, and the use of plain language as the standard for all written communication will make it easier to translate those communications into other languages;

WHEREAS,

As Maryland continues its efforts to leave no one behind, it is critical that the State commits to increasing access to government by communicating with all Marylanders in an accessible, easy to understand way, which includes developing and using plain language standards for written communications.

NOW, THEREFORE,

I, WES MOORE, GOVERNOR OF THE STATE OF MARYLAND, BY THE VIRTUE OF THE AUTHORITY VESTED IN ME BY THE CONSTITUTION AND LAWS OF MARYLAND, HEREBY PROCLAIM THE FOLLOWING EXECUTIVE ORDER, EFFECTIVE IMMEDIATELY:

A. Definitions.

(1) "Plain Language" means writing that is clear, concise, well-organized, and follows other best practices appropriate to the subject or field and intended audience.

(2) "State Agency" means a department, agency, commission, board, council, or other body of State government subject to the direction and supervision of the Governor.

(3) "Written Communication" means information on State agency websites and other written documents produced by State agencies intended for the public.

B. Establishment. There is a Maryland Plain Language Initiative, housed in the Maryland Digital Service in the Department of Information Technology.

C. Partners. The Maryland Digital Service will partner with the Department of Disabilities and the Governor's Office of Community Initiatives to leverage their expertise for content reviews and testing with individuals with disabilities. The Chief Digital Experience Officer will work with other relevant agencies and external stakeholders as necessary to implement the Maryland Plain Language Initiative.

D. Duties. The Maryland Plain Language Initiative shall include:

(1) An assessment of the State's capacity, needs, and resources to implement best practices in the use of plain language standards.

(2) The creation of the Maryland Plain Language Plan to enhance the accessibility of all written communication produced by State agencies, including through publishing plain language standards.

- E. The Maryland Plain Language Plan shall:
- (1) Include focused plain language efforts as part of any website design or redesign effort.
 - (2) Include plain language evaluation during discovery efforts to evaluate or improve any public facing application or system.
 - (3) Include recommendations to build capacity, develop resources, provide training, and conduct pilot projects.
 - (4) Identify plain language standards, which include the use of:
 - a. Everyday words that convey meanings clearly and directly;
 - b. Present tense and active voice;
 - c. Short, simple sentences;
 - d. Definitions of only those words that cannot be properly explained or qualified in the text; and
 - e. Layout and design that help the reader understand the meaning of the document, including adequate white space, bulleted lists, helpful headings, and other proven techniques.
 - (5) Consider the following in development:
 - a. Designating a plain language contact for each State agency;
 - b. Developing a style guide, templates, and resources for all State agencies;
 - c. Conducting pilot projects on written documents targeted at the public and collecting feedback to improve plain language efforts;
 - d. Developing a training plan so each State agency is trained about the use of plain language; and
 - e. Identifying available resources, including contracted services, to carry out any section of the Plan.

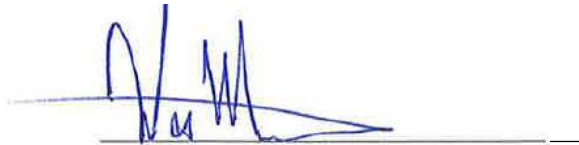
F. The Maryland Digital Service shall report to the Governor annually by December 31 on the State's progress toward achieving the goals of the Maryland Plain Language Initiative.

G. All State agencies shall, in support of Maryland's core mission to leave no one behind, implement the recommendations of the Maryland Plain Language Plan, in phases as outlined in the Plan.

H. This Executive Order shall be implemented in a manner that is consistent with all applicable statutes and regulations. Nothing in this Executive Order shall operate to contravene any State or federal law or to affect the State's receipt of federal funding.

I. If any provision of this Executive Order or its application to any person, entity, or circumstance is held invalid by any court of competent jurisdiction, all other provisions or applications of the Executive Order shall remain in effect to the extent possible without the invalid provision or application. To achieve this purpose, the provisions of this Executive Order are severable.

GIVEN Under My Hand and the Great Seal of the State of Maryland, in the City of Annapolis, this 23rd Day of July 2024.



Wes Moore
Governor

ATTEST:



Susan C. Lee
Secretary of State

