

# New Arkansas law would enforce literacy tests on commercial drivers, in racist attack on immigrants

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A bill in the Arkansas state house of representatives, “Secure Roads and Safe Trucking Act of 2025,” would mandate English language proficiency for commercial motor vehicle operators. The bill, HB1569, would effectively establishes a blank check for racial profiling by granting police officers sweeping powers to stop and interrogate drivers they “suspect” of not knowing English. It will inevitably lead to increased harassment of Hispanic and immigrant drivers, promoting an environment of fear and intimidation across the state.

The racist bill comes amid the Trump administration’s rampage against immigrants, using non-existent “invasions” of immigrants as justification for dismantling the Constitution and setting up a presidential dictatorship.

These literacy tests are apparently already being enforced. A TikTok video recently went viral showing a white truck driver being subjected to an impromptu literacy test at an Arkansas weigh station. The driver was handed a piece of paper and was asked, “Can you read and write English?” The driver responded, “Yes, Sir, I sure can.” The officer then follows up with, “Can you read this?” referring to the paper. The driver obliged.

The officer then asked if he could demonstrate that he could write, noting numerous others had written on the paper in question. It was there the driver noticed people in handcuffs and asked the officer what was going on. The officer, according to the driver, said, “We’ve come across now that if you cannot read or write in English, that is a \$5,000 fine, and if you have a company in Arkansas that employs people who cannot read or write in English is a \$10,000 fine [to be] paid on the spot. If you cannot pay it, you are automatically arrested and

lose your license.”

While the driver in question was white, the implications of HB1569 are clear: it is a weapon aimed squarely at the working class, particularly immigrants, who are already under siege by the Trump administration’s fascist immigration policies.

The bill, while absurdly presenting itself as in the interest of “public safety,” recalls some of the worst abuses of the Jim Crow era, specifically the use of literacy tests to deny black people the right to vote following the abolition of slavery and the passage of the 15th Amendment guaranteeing the right to vote regardless of color.

The nationwide attack on immigrants also recalls another dark chapter in American history: the detention of over 120,000 Japanese Americans during World War II. Today, under the same Alien Enemies Act used to carry out that policy, the Trump administration is preparing to imprison migrants, using military bases as sites of mass incarceration.

Such measures are tools of division, designed to pit workers against one another and establish a police-state style regime in the working class.

## Functional illiteracy rampant in the state and US

The irony of HB1569 is that it imposes English proficiency requirements in a state where literacy rates are in crisis. According to Literacy Action of Central Arkansas, 23 percent of Arkansans—approximately 690,000 people—are functionally illiterate, while 38

percent struggle with basic text-based tasks.

The latest data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), known as the Nation's Report Card, exposes the deepening crisis in Arkansas' public education system. A staggering 40 percent of fourth-grade students in the state scored below basic proficiency in reading—the highest rate since 2002. While Arkansas' scores have remained stagnant, they continue to trail far behind national averages, with fourth graders ranking 49th in math and 43rd in reading.

These staggering figures are the result of a systematic underfunding of public education by both parties, even while Trump and the extreme right try to scapegoat immigrants and lack of resources for schools and social programs continue to deepen.

The result is a generation of children denied the basic tools of literacy and numeracy, condemned to a future of low-wage labor and economic insecurity.

The crisis in Arkansas is a microcosm of the broader collapse of public education across the United States, where schools in working class and rural areas are starved of funding. Trump and Education Secretary Linda McMahon have launched a full-scale assault on the US public education system.

The Department of Education, a critical institution supporting underfunded schools and enforcing anti-discrimination policies, is being systematically dismantled. Landmark rulings such as *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), which desegregated schools, the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (1975), which guaranteed education for students with disabilities, and *Plyler v. Doe* (1982), which protected the rights of English-language learners and migrant children, are now under direct threat.

A major element of this attack is Trump's national school voucher proposal, which would divert billions of public dollars into private hands. The plan offers a 100 percent federal tax credit for donations to voucher programs. This scheme represents a brazen transfer of wealth from working class families to private corporations and religious institutions, further entrenching inequality and undermining the right to a quality education for all.

## Workers must mobilize against this measure

The bill in Arkansas is a warning to the working class. The ruling class, faced with growing social inequality and the threat of mass resistance, is turning to increasingly authoritarian and fascistic measures against the working class.

This will inevitably engender opposition. Among truckers, a powerful impulse of solidarity with immigrant workers exists. This was shown in late 2021, when they organized a nationwide boycott of the state of Colorado to protest a 100-year sentence for Rogel Aguilera-Mederos, a 26-year-old truck driver involved in a fatal crash when his brakes failed. The campaign, organized almost entirely over social media, eventually forced the governor to reduce his sentence to 10 years.

As one worker said at the time: "Truckers stand together and stand strong, we are a force to be reckoned with. The mainstream media will not give its undivided attention because they know we could bring the government to its knees if we just stand together for a cause."

A broader movement of the working class is needed today, linking up truckers with other industries and "foreign" and "native" workers in a fight against dictatorship.



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