

California revokes 17,000 immigrant truckers' licenses as Trump intensifies attacks

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20 November 2025

California officials announced this month that they will revoke more than 17,000 commercial driver's licenses issued to immigrants after determining that the state should never have granted them under a state law that barred noncitizens without federal work authorization from holding commercial credentials.

The California Department of Motor Vehicles sent out notices on November 6. Drivers will have 60 days to respond before their licenses are canceled, and many may lose their jobs immediately afterward. The move affects workers throughout transportation, logistics and agriculture, including long haul truckers who have held these licenses for years.

The DMV said it discovered the “technical limitations in its system” after an internal audit and consultation with federal regulators who warned the state that the licenses were “not compliant with federal requirements.”

At the same time, the Trump administration is imposing new federal rules that would sharply reduce the number of immigrant commercial truck drivers, especially in California.

Under the pretext of “public safety,” the Department of Transportation (DOT) is moving to bar refugees, asylum seekers and DACA recipients from holding or renewing commercial licenses, rules that would immediately threaten the livelihoods of tens of thousands of drivers in California alone. Roughly 8 percent of the state's 720,000 active commercial licenses (about 61,000) are held by workers in these categories. Nationwide, this would potentially affect 194,000 workers.

The administration is simultaneously escalating enforcement against drivers with limited English

proficiency. These moves are being timed for rapid implementation, potentially as early as January, with the clear intent of pushing immigrant workers out of one of the state's most essential industries.

Behind the scenes, the new rules are being enforced through coercion. Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy has threatened to strip California of \$160 million in federal highway safety funding, with an additional \$40 million at risk over claims the state is failing to enforce English-language requirements.

The DOT claims to have conducted a “nationwide audit” of state licensing systems, yet has published findings only for California, a politically convenient target as the administration escalates its anti-immigrant agenda.

Even the DOT concedes there is “insufficient evidence” that immigrant drivers pose any unique risk, exposing the administration's narrative as a deliberate effort to scapegoat workers while ignoring the real causes of trucking fatalities, including speedup, overwork and deregulation.

The announcement triggered widespread fear among immigrant communities, already terrorized through months of ICE raids, militarized sieges and mass deportations, and immediate political buck-passing by California Democrats. State officials publicly framed the issue as fallout from the Trump administration's escalating attacks on immigrants, pointing to intensifying federal pressure on state agencies.

Yet the legal basis for the 17,000 initial revocations rests largely on California statutes and regulations such as the California Code of Regulations (CCR). The Legislature, dominated by Democrats for decades, wrote and approved the very statute that restricts

commercial licenses to immigrants with federal work documents. The state is enforcing its own reactionary framework and hiding behind Trump to mask its complicity.

Governor Gavin Newsom and Attorney General Rob Bonta quickly issued statements posturing as opponents of Trump's immigration policies, claiming that federal hostility has created an atmosphere of "uncertainty" and "fear." But their attempt to shift blame collapses on the most basic facts: in revoking the licenses, the DMV cited state law, not any new federal rule or mandate.

At the same time, there is no doubt that the Trump administration is applying intense pressure on state governments, including California, as part of its broader drive to criminalize immigrants and expand deportations.

While there are deepening conflicts within the ruling class, the revocations flow from the bipartisan structure of immigration enforcement built over decades. No less than the Republicans, Democratic administrations have made history for the large numbers of deportations, most notably under Obama. They continue to adamantly uphold laws designed to keep millions of workers in a condition of permanent insecurity.

The consequences for the affected workers will be devastating. For many, the CDL is their only viable source of income. These workers operate heavy trucks, buses and other commercial vehicles. Many have held commercial licenses and stable jobs for years. Some completed state-approved training programs and paid thousands of dollars for certifications the state now says they were never entitled to receive.

Tens of thousands are now at risk of losing their income, housing and ability to support their families. This catastrophe will be felt across logistics, agriculture and construction, industries already plagued by overwork and exploitation.

Employers, especially in the logistics corridors of Southern California, are already preparing contingency plans to replace them. The state has offered no compensation, transition support or legal pathway for workers to regain their licenses.

The mass revocation of licenses further exposes the long-standing fraud of "sanctuary" states and cities. For years, the Democrats have invoked the term to posture as a humane alternative to the Republicans, yet they have not shielded a single immigrant from the

machinery of federal repression.

Last October, Newsom staged a highly publicized signing of SB 98, AB 49 and SB 81, presenting them as bold defenses of immigrants and waving the "sanctuary state" banner in defiance of Trump's mass-deportation campaign. These bills were empty gestures that left the federal deportation apparatus entirely untouched.

Far from challenging the foundations of Trump's program, they accepted the legitimacy of ICE, the permanence of mass expulsions and the basic premises of the anti-immigrant framework.

The escalating conflict between the Trump administration and Democratic-led states like California is not a struggle between anti-immigrant and pro-immigrant forces but a dispute over how to manage and discipline a workforce that is essential to capitalist exploitation.

The initial revocation of 17,000 commercial licenses is a warning to immigrant workers and the working class as a whole. As economic and political crises sharpen, both parties are prepared to deploy the mechanisms of the state against the most vulnerable layers of the workforce. The necessary response is the independent mobilization of workers themselves, across citizenship status and industry, against both the open attacks of the Republican right and the hypocritical, equally destructive policies of the Democratic establishment.



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