

Trump's CDL Final Rule strips 200,000 immigrant truck drivers of licenses in sweeping attack on the working class

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On March 16, the Trump administration's Non-Domiciled CDL Final Rule effectively revoked the licenses of roughly 200,000 truck drivers. This is a major new stage in the administration's fascistic assault on immigrant workers and the working class as a whole.

The rule sharply limits "non-domiciled" commercial driver's licenses (CDLs) to a narrow set of temporary visa holders—specifically H-2A farm workers, H-2B seasonal non-farm workers, and certain E-2 treaty investors. It also forces state licensing agencies to check every such applicant against federal immigration databases before issuing or renewing a CDL.

In practice, drivers who relied on Employment Authorization Documents (EADs)—including DACA and Temporary Protected Status holders, refugees and asylum seekers with long records of safe work on US roads—will be allowed to drive only until their current licenses expire and will then be barred from renewing. An analysis by shipper J.B. Hunt estimates that roughly 97 percent of current non-domiciled CDL holders will be unable to renew or re-enter the system over the next two to three years.

The rule is part of a vicious political campaign to brand immigrant drivers as unsafe and illegal. Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy has repeatedly used high-profile highway incidents to claim that immigrant drivers pose a safety threat, even though states had issued valid CDLs to those drivers based on then-current federal rules and their work authorizations.

The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) framed the problem as an "unacceptable bifurcated standard," arguing that domestic driving records can be queried through the Commercial

Driver's License Information System (CDLIS) and the Problem Driver Pointer System (PDPS), while the driving histories of many immigrants are retained in their countries of origin.

Instead of pursuing international data-sharing or certification procedures to address that gap, the agency treated immigration vetting as a proxy for safety, converting legal status into the main test of whether someone may earn a living at the wheel.

This offensive began during Trump's first term with FMCSA audits and proposals to tighten licensing rules. It escalated at the beginning of his second term with an executive order that falsely linked English proficiency to safety, and continued with a 2025 Interim Final Rule that narrowed eligible categories, shortened license validity to one year or less and required states to verify immigration status through federal databases.

Despite legal challenges and a court stay, the administration revoked accreditation for thousands of CDL training centers nationwide at the end of last year and issued the 2026 Final Rule on February 13 with little substantive change.

Nowhere has the administration's anti-immigrant campaign been more aggressive than in California, where about 13,000 non-domiciled CDLs were canceled in a single day on March 6. California capitulated after the Department of Transportation threatened to withhold \$160 million in highway funds and to decertify the state CDL program—a step that would have paralyzed much of the state's commercial trucking sector.

The order also affected drivers' noncommercial Class C licenses, leaving many unable to drive personal vehicles until they reapply. The FMCSA mandated a

pause on processing non-domiciled CDLs and Commercial Learner's Permits (CLPs) for up to one year while the state proves full compliance with federal standards, leaving canceled applicants in limbo even after a state court ordered the DMV to accept them.

The impact will be devastating. A driver in Sacramento told CBS that losing his CDL would "destroy everything and all my hard work from the last five years," detailing truck payments, family responsibilities and the years he spent building a small business in California's freight sector.

In comments to Cal Matters, an immigrant owner of a small trucking company conveyed the broader impact of losing California's drivers: "It's a chain. It's not only the driver. You have dispatchers, brokers, farm workers—local drivers carrying the freight from farms to distribution yards. For each driver, 10 people will be affected. It's not 17,000," he noted, "approximately 200,000 people will be affected in the Central Valley alone."

Democrats have limited themselves to sound bites and hearings, offering no federal bills or direct legal defense for these workers.

In fact, the Democrats built and administered the deportation and immigration enforcement infrastructure that made this rule possible, the mass deportations under both Obama and Biden. The Democrats are co-architects and collaborators in the assault on immigrant workers.

While immigrant drivers face the destruction of their livelihoods, the AFL-CIO trade union apparatus has confined itself to narrow legal maneuvers—treating the Final Rule as a matter of technical compliance rather than a class attack. The apparatus is opposed to mass strikes or other action to stop this massive assault on immigrant workers.

The American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), the AFL-CIO, and Public Citizen challenged both the 2025 Interim Final Rule and the 2026 Final Rule, filing suit to block the March 16 effective date.

The Teamsters limited themselves to public comments opposing the interim rule, with no workplace action as the Final Rule took effect. Teamsters president Sean O'Brien endorsed Trump at the Republican National Convention in 2024 and has

backed the nationalist and anti-immigrant policies of the Trump government.

The Non-Domiciled CDL Final Rule is one front in a coordinated ruling-class offensive against the democratic rights of the entire working class. The same administration that is stripping immigrant truck drivers of their livelihoods is simultaneously mounting a constitutional assault on birthright citizenship, deploying the military and federal agents against immigrant communities and implementing a massive assault on jobs and social programs.

The attack on immigrant drivers is an attack on the whole of the working class, and it will only be answered when workers recognize it as such.

This rule, like all the fascist policies of the Trump administration, will not be defeated by lawsuits. The defense of the working class must be taken into workplaces, freight yards and communities—organized democratically and united across logistics chains and borders. Workers must form independent rank-and-file committees in trucking companies, depots and ports to defend the democratic right to work.



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