

An Uncertain Road: The Trump Administration's Pause on New Visas for Commercial Truck Drivers

Article

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On August 22, 2025, Secretary of State Marco Rubio announced the federal government will pause issuing new visas for foreigners seeking to be commercial truck drivers.

On X, Rubio said: “[T]he increasing number of foreign drivers operating large tractor-trailer trucks on U.S. roads is endangering American lives and undercutting the livelihoods of American truckers.”

The announcement came after a fatal accident involving an alleged undocumented immigrant who reportedly made an illegal U-turn with a commercial vehicle. According to reports, the driver had obtained his commercial driver's license (CDL) in California. Rubio did not specify how long the pause would last, though visa allocations are traditionally tied to the federal fiscal year, which ends on September 30, 2025.

Industry Response

The American Trucking Associations (ATA), the largest and most comprehensive national trade association for the trucking industry, expressed support for the pause. “The issuance of non-domiciled (CDLs) needs serious scrutiny, including the enforcement of entry-level driver training standards,” Chris Spear, ATA CEO said. “Fraudulent and non-compliant entities continue to fast-track CDL applicants with minimal, if any, training.”

Under the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration's (FMCSA) Entry-Level Driver Training (ELDT) rule, drivers must complete prescribed classroom and behind-the-wheel training from an FMCSA-approved provider listed on the Training Provider Registry (TPR) before taking a CDL skills test. ATA pointed out that since 2023, only four training providers have been removed for noncompliance with ELDT standards, even though the FMCSA continues to receive widespread reports of fraud.

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At the same time, ATA has acknowledged a growing driver shortage. While the association supports tighter training oversight, restrictions on foreign drivers may deepen workforce challenges

The Driver Shortage

As of 2024, there were 3.58 million CDL-holding drivers employed in America. Though 2025 numbers are unclear, the ATA acknowledged a driver shortage in the trucking industry before a Senate Commerce subcommittee. According to the ATA, “the industry fully expects the shortage to worsen when the freight market recovers. Over the next decade, trucking companies will need to hire roughly 1.2 million new drivers to keep pace with growing freight demand and an aging workforce.”

According to the Department of Homeland Security, a few thousand visas were given to “transportation and material-moving” occupations across all sectors in 2025 which accounted for only 3.5 percent of all visas. Although the number of foreign truck drivers entering the labor pool is relatively small, even modest restrictions could further strain a market where demand already exceeds supply.

Legal and Compliance Considerations for Employers

With uncertainty surrounding both the scope and duration of the pause, trucking companies and logistics providers should take proactive steps to protect operations and minimize risk. Employers should:

- **Audit training providers** to confirm compliance with FMCSA’s ELDT rule and the TPR.
- **Monitor visa policy developments** and anticipate potential delays or workforce gaps.
- **Plan for workforce continuity** by assessing reliance on foreign drivers and developing alternative recruitment strategies.
- **Evaluate contractual obligations** that may be impacted by labor shortages, including delivery deadlines and service levels.
- **Consult with legal counsel** on immigration compliance, workforce planning, and potential exposure to liability if drivers are trained by noncompliant providers.

The trucking industry is navigating an uncertain road. While the federal government seeks to address safety and training concerns, employers must balance regulatory compliance with workforce realities. Careful planning and legal guidance will be essential for managing the months ahead.

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