

Publications

What President Trump's "English-Only" Executive Orders Mean for Employers Nationwide

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On March 1, 2025, President Trump signed Executive Order 14224 designating English as the official language of the United States. Framed as a step toward national cohesion, the Order revoked a Clinton-era directive (Executive Order 13166) that had promoted access to government services for individuals with limited English proficiency. Although the new Order stops short of requiring agencies to abandon non-English services, it marks a sharp rhetorical and policy shift that is already influencing federal enforcement.

This pivot became more concrete with the issuance of Executive Order 14286 on April 28, 2025, targeting English-language proficiency in the trucking industry. The Order directs the Department of Transportation and the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) to enforce long-standing but inconsistently applied regulations requiring commercial drivers to demonstrate English proficiency. This places an immediate compliance burden on employers in the trucking industry, as each out-of-service designation can disrupt operations, trigger expensive recovery procedures, and potentially reduce an already strained labor pool.

Although the Orders speak directly to government policy and the trucking sector, their broader message is clear: English-only mandates are no longer merely symbolic. They are becoming enforcement priorities. For private employers, this raises important legal and compliance questions, especially for industries that rely heavily on multilingual workforces.

Under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, blanket English-only workplace rules are presumptively unlawful unless the employer can demonstrate a business necessity. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) has long warned against overly broad English-only policies, citing the risk of discrimination based on national origin. Courts have permitted narrowly tailored policies where employers can show legitimate justifications—such as safety, customer service, or operational efficiency—but policies applied to breaks, private conversations, or non-job-related settings remain highly vulnerable to

challenge.

So, what comes next? The trucking industry may be the first formal target of enhanced English-only enforcement, but others could soon follow. Although the trucking industry is the first direct target, employers across other industries should anticipate similar scrutiny. Industries most at risk include those where communication directly implicates safety or regulatory compliance, such as construction, warehousing, food production, health care and energy. These sectors rely heavily on multilingual workers, making them particularly vulnerable to a future English-only enforcement mandate.

Employers in these industries should not assume that federal enforcement actions will stop with truck drivers. Nor should they interpret the designation of English as the official language as a green light to impose sweeping language restrictions in the workplace. Any such policy must be carefully calibrated to a specific business need and should be reviewed by counsel before implementation.

Although the long-term enforceability of these Executive Orders may be subject to litigation—particularly on constitutional or statutory grounds—employers should act now to understand their exposure and prepare accordingly. A proactive compliance review is more cost-effective than a legal defense after the fact.

For assistance navigating these changes or crafting compliant language policies, contact your Vorys attorney.