

2025 has been a year of many challenges, shifting policies, and increased uncertainty for the immigrant and refugee communities across the U.S. Recent federal executive actions and agency guidance have limited access to legal immigration benefits, including **partial or full travel restrictions affecting 39 countries, narrowing or termination of Temporary Protected Status (TPS)** for over 10 nationalities, **revisions to the U.S. naturalization process** -- such as a harder civics test and discretionary evaluations of "good moral character" -- and guidance **reducing multilingual services** following the designation of English as the official language. At the same time, uncertainty around eligibility for accessing federally funded adult ESOL programs and delays in work authorization and renewals have made it harder for adults to access both education and employment. Together, these changes have created additional barriers to stability, lawful work, and a clear pathway to citizenship.

Across the country, federal executive actions in 2025 have also placed greater emphasis on English proficiency for certain workforce credentials. For example, applicants for Commercial Driver's License (CDLs) must now demonstrate sufficient ability to understand traffic signs, communicate with law enforcement, and complete required reports. Similar trends are emerging in healthcare and other regulated sectors, signaling that language skills may become an increasingly important factor for employment and career advancement. Changes to eligibility criteria for public benefits, particularly SNAP and EBT, further compound these challenges. As of December 1, 2025, refugees are no longer immediately eligible for SNAP benefits unless they have held lawful permanent resident status for at least five years, a shift that disproportionately affects refugees resettled in 2024, including families with children who have not yet received their green cards.

Taken together, these developments make long-term planning more difficult for our learners and their families, increase stress and instability, and heighten the risk of exclusion from essential services such as healthcare, education, and the workforce.

English learning has never been more important. As Blue Ridge Literacy celebrates 40 years of service, we remain committed to providing high-quality, relevant, and affordable English programs to our community. Our staff continues to monitor policy changes, share accurate and timely information, connect learners with trusted service providers, and build new partnerships to meet emerging needs. Through this work, we help ensure that learners can access the resources they are entitled to and navigate an increasingly complex immigration and naturalization landscape.

Spring semester starts January 2026 -- and we are now registering new learners! **Please help us in ensuring that every adult in our community knows about and can access these essential programs.**

Sincerely,



Ahoo Salem, Ph.D.