

Submitter: Amber Evans
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Joint Special Committee On Referendum Petition
2026-302
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB1599

Opposition to Oregon SB 1599

Re: Changing the Election Date for Referendum Petition 2026-302

I respectfully oppose Oregon Senate Bill 1599, which moves the election date for the portions of Chapter 1, Oregon Laws 2025 (Special Session) referred to the people by Referendum Petition 2026-302 from the general election to the May 19, 2026 primary election.

1. Undermines Voter Participation

General elections consistently have significantly higher voter turnout than primary elections. Moving a referred measure to a primary election limits participation to a smaller, more partisan subset of voters, effectively excluding many Oregonians—particularly unaffiliated, independent, and infrequent primary voters—from having a meaningful voice on an issue of statewide importance.

Referendum measures are meant to be decided by the broadest electorate possible, not a narrowed pool.

2. Erodes the Purpose of the Referendum Process

The Oregon Constitution protects the people's right to approve or reject laws passed by the Legislature through referendum. SB 1599 interferes with that process by altering the timing after citizens have already exercised their constitutional right. Changing the election date midstream creates the appearance that the Legislature is managing the outcome rather than respecting the process.

3. Creates an Uneven Playing Field

Primary elections are dominated by party-affiliated voters and party-driven messaging. Referendum Petition 2026-302 is not a partisan candidate contest—it is a policy decision affecting all Oregonians. Holding the vote during a primary unfairly advantages organized political interests while disadvantaging average voters who typically engage during general elections.

4. Sets a Concerning Precedent

If the Legislature can move election dates for referred measures when politically convenient, it establishes a dangerous precedent. Future citizen-led referendums could be similarly manipulated, weakening public trust in Oregon's direct democracy system.

5. Reduces Transparency and Public Confidence

Oregonians expect stability and predictability in election procedures. Altering election timing for a specific measure raises legitimate concerns about transparency, fairness, and legislative overreach, and risks eroding confidence in the integrity of the electoral process.

Conclusion

SB 1599 diminishes voter participation, weakens the referendum process, and undermines public trust. Matters referred to the people should be decided during general elections, when the full electorate is most likely to participate.

For these reasons, I urge lawmakers to oppose SB 1599 and allow Referendum Petition 2026-302 to be voted on during the general election, where it belongs.