

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

Chair and Members of the Committee:

I respectfully oppose Senate Bill 1599, which would move the referendum vote on Referendum Petition 2026-302 from the regular November general election to the May 19, 2026 primary election. This change is unnecessary, inequitable, and undermines the foundational principle of broad voter participation.

1. SB 1599 Reduces Voter Participation

Historically, primary elections — especially May primaries — have significantly lower turnout than November general elections. For example, in Oregon's last gubernatorial primary turnout was about 37 % compared to roughly 67 % in the general election. Lower turnout means fewer voices are represented in deciding whether a major tax and fee package goes forward. Moving this important vote to a low-turnout election effectively disenfranchises many voters.

2. The Will of the Voters Is Being Disregarded

More than 250,000 Oregonians signed the referendum petition with the clear understanding and expectation that the vote would be held in November, the election with the widest participation. Changing the date mid-process after such broad engagement appears to dismiss the expressed will of Oregon voters and gives the appearance of altering the rules to affect the outcome.

3. Short Timelines Inhibit Public Engagement and Fair Process

SB 1599's emergency clause and accelerated timeline shorten the time for voters and civic organizations to prepare meaningful arguments and gather signatures for the voters' pamphlet. This rushed schedule limits public awareness and debate, reducing transparency and accountability in governance.

4. Trust in the Political Process Is Undermined When Calendars Are Changed for Political Advantage

When election dates are altered after a referendum campaign has gathered signatures and mobilized voters, it fosters public distrust and cynicism. A referendum — particularly one involving tax and fee increases — should be decided when the greatest number of voters can participate, not shifted for perceived political advantage.

Conclusion:

For these reasons, I urge you to oppose SB 1599 and preserve the integrity of our democratic process by keeping the referendum on HB 3991 and similar measures on the November general election ballot. Oregon voters deserve a fair and full opportunity to make their voices heard.