

Written Testimony in Opposition to SB 1599

Oregon State Senate

To the Members of the Senate:

My name is Kevin Beery, and I am an Oregon voter. I respectfully submit this testimony in strong opposition to SB 1599. SB 1599 is unconstitutional, anti-democratic, and represents an improper attempt to manipulate Oregon's referendum process after the people have already exercised their rights under the Oregon Constitution.

1. SB 1599 conflicts with the Oregon Constitution.

Article IV, section 1 of the Oregon Constitution reserves the power of referendum to the people and contemplates that such measures be decided at a general election, when voter participation is at its highest. Moving a duly-qualified referendum from the November general election to a May election—after petitions have already been circulated and signed—undermines the constitutional design and interferes with the people's reserved legislative power. The Legislature does not have the authority to change the rules mid-stream simply because it dislikes the political consequences of a referendum.

2. SB 1599 is a transparent attempt to suppress voter participation.

General elections consistently produce the highest voter turnout in Oregon. May elections do not. Shifting a high-profile referendum to a lower-turnout election predictably reduces public participation and distorts the will of the electorate. That result is not incidental—it is the obvious and intended effect of this bill. Oregonians across the political spectrum should reject efforts to decide major tax policy in elections where fewer voters are likely to participate.

3. SB 1599 appears designed to avoid political accountability.

The referendum at issue would allow voters to weigh in directly on recent transportation tax and fee increases. Keeping that vote on the November ballot ensures transparency and accountability by allowing voters to evaluate those policies in a high-visibility election, where elected officials—including

the Governor—are clearly associated with the outcome. Moving the referendum to May instead weakens that accountability and insulates decision-makers from the political consequences of their actions. That is not how a constitutional republic should function.

4. This bill sets a dangerous precedent.

If the Legislature can move a referendum to a lower-turnout election whenever it fears an unfavorable result, then the referendum power reserved to the people becomes meaningless. SB 1599 would establish a precedent that future Legislatures could exploit to nullify direct democracy whenever it becomes inconvenient. Oregon's initiative and referendum system is one of the strongest in the nation. SB 1599 would weaken it substantially.

For these reasons, I urge you to vote NO on SB 1599 and to respect the constitutional rights of Oregon voters. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

Respectfully,



Kevin J. Beery
Eugene, Oregon