

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

Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Reuben Hines, and I respectfully submit this testimony in strong opposition to SB 1599.

SB 1599 would move the election date for the transportation ballot measure repealing Governor Kotek's \$4.3 billion gas tax from the November 2026 General Election to the May Primary Election. This change is not a neutral administrative adjustment—it is a significant alteration to the democratic process that risks undermining voter participation, transparency, and public trust.

First, moving this vote to a lower-turnout primary election effectively disenfranchises voters. General elections consistently see the highest participation across political affiliations and demographics. In contrast, primary elections attract fewer voters and tend to skew toward more partisan and highly engaged groups. A decision of this magnitude—one that affects transportation funding, household costs, and the statewide tax burden—should be decided by the broadest possible electorate, not a smaller and less representative subset of voters.

Second, SB 1599 creates unnecessary barriers to public engagement and free expression. By accelerating the election timeline, the bill makes it more difficult for citizens to gather signatures and submit arguments for inclusion in the official voter pamphlet. The voter pamphlet is one of the most important tools Oregonians rely on to make informed decisions. Restricting access to this process weakens public debate and favors institutional interests over grassroots participation.

Third, the circumstances surrounding SB 1599 raise serious concerns about transparency and public confidence. Reports that the bill was not initially visible on the official Legislative website—while appearing on third-party trackers—only heighten suspicion that this measure is being rushed or obscured from public scrutiny. Regardless of intent, the perception of secrecy damages trust in the legislative process at a time when confidence in government is already fragile.

Finally, the timing and structure of this bill give the appearance of manipulating election rules to influence an outcome, rather than allowing voters to weigh in fairly. Election laws should be stable, predictable, and designed to maximize participation—not adjusted midstream to benefit one side of a contentious public policy debate.

For these reasons, I urge the Legislature to reject SB 1599 and allow this transportation ballot measure to remain on the November General Election ballot, where all Oregonians have the greatest opportunity to participate and be heard.

Thank you for considering my testimony and for your service to the people of Oregon.

Respectfully submitted,
Reuben Hines
Beaverton, washington county