

Submitter: Concerned Oregon Citizen Decline to Disclose
On Behalf Of: Citizens of Bend and Deschutes County
Committee: Joint Special Committee On Referendum Petition
2026-302
Measure, Appointment or
Topic: SB1599

Written Testimony in Opposition to SB 1599
Joint Special Committee on Referendum Petition 2026-302
February 9, 2026

Chair and Members of the Committee,

I respectfully submit this testimony in opposition to **SB 1599**, which would move the election on Referendum Petition 2026-302 from the November general election to the May primary.

More than **250,000 Oregonians** signed a valid petition to refer the Legislature's \$4.3 billion tax and fee increase to the people. That number reflects broad, bipartisan concern and a clear expectation that the question will be decided in the **general election**, when the largest and most representative share of the electorate participates. SB 1599 would undermine that expectation.

Changing the election date midstream creates the appearance—if not the reality—of manipulating the rules after citizens have exercised their constitutional right to referendum. Oregonians reasonably expect that once a measure is qualified, the process will not be altered to produce a more favorable political outcome. Moving the vote to May, when turnout is historically lower and less representative than November, risks disenfranchising many voters and eroding trust in the integrity of our election system.

This is not an abstract concern. General elections draw the widest cross-section of voters—working families, rural residents, seniors, and young voters alike. Primary elections, by contrast, typically see reduced participation. Decisions of this magnitude—billions in new taxes and fees affecting every Oregonian—should be made when the public's voice is at its loudest, not when it is most easily muted.

SB 1599 also sets a troubling precedent. If the Legislature can move a referendum election because it dislikes the policy being challenged or fears the outcome, then the referendum power itself is weakened. The right of the people to approve or reject laws passed by the Legislature should not depend on political convenience or tactical calculations.

Finally, Oregonians are already struggling with affordability—fuel, housing, food, and

utilities. The public deserves a fair, transparent, and predictable process to evaluate tax and fee increases that directly affect their cost of living. Playing calendar games with a duly qualified referendum only deepens cynicism and distrust at a time when confidence in public institutions is already fragile.

For these reasons, I urge the Committee to **oppose SB 1599** and keep Referendum Petition 2026-302 on the **November general election ballot**, where it belongs. Let the people decide—under the rules as they existed when they signed, and in the election with the broadest participation.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony and for your consideration.