

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

Re: Senate Bill 1599 — Election Date for Voter-Referred Measure

Chair and Members of the Committee,

I respectfully submit testimony in opposition to moving the election date for the voter-referred transportation funding measure from the November 2026 general election to the May 19, 2026 primary election.

The referendum process exists to ensure that when a substantial number of voters believe a law warrants public review, that question is decided by the broadest and most representative electorate possible. The large number of petition signatures collected to place this measure on the ballot reflects a clear expectation that the issue would appear on a general election ballot, when voter participation is highest and public awareness is greatest.

Moving this vote to a primary election undermines that expectation.

Primary elections are materially different from general elections in both turnout and electorate composition. While Oregon's vote-by-mail system ensures ballots are accessible, accessibility alone does not ensure voter awareness. Many voters—particularly non-affiliated voters and those less engaged in party primaries—reasonably associate major statewide policy decisions with November elections. Changing the election date creates a genuine risk that voters who oppose the measure may unintentionally miss the opportunity to participate, not due to apathy, but due to altered timing and reduced visibility.

This concern is supported by Oregon's own election data. Primary election turnout is consistently and significantly lower than general election turnout, meaning fewer voters would decide an issue that was explicitly referred for broader public consideration. While the Legislature may have the authority to alter election timing, doing so in this context raises concerns about fairness and public confidence in the referendum process.

Even if unintended, moving the vote to a lower-turnout election creates the appearance of procedural advantage, which risks eroding trust in Oregon's system of direct democracy. Voter-referred measures should be decided under conditions that maximize participation, transparency, and public confidence—not ones that narrow

the electorate.

For these reasons, I urge the Legislature to allow this referendum to proceed on the November 2026 general election ballot, where voters reasonably expect to decide major statewide policy questions and where participation is highest, most inclusive, and most representative.

Respectfully submitted,
Ree Klein
Gold Beach, Curry County