

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

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Steve, and I am an Oregon resident. I am writing to respectfully urge you to vote NO on Senate Bill 1599.

In the fall of last year, approximately 250,000 Oregonians signed a valid referendum petition to place Governor Kotek's transportation tax and fee increases before voters on the November 2026 general election ballot. SB 1599 would move that referendum to the May primary election, a change that raises serious concerns about voter participation and the integrity of the referendum process.

General elections consistently have significantly higher voter turnout than primary elections. Moving a citizen-driven referendum from November to May would reduce the number of voters able to participate in a decision involving statewide tax increases. Regardless of one's position on the underlying transportation policy, Oregonians deserve the opportunity to weigh in during the election with the broadest and most representative participation.

Referendums exist precisely to give voters a direct check on major legislative actions. Altering the election timing after the petition threshold has been met undermines that purpose and risks setting a precedent in which the rules governing citizen referendums can be changed midstream.

Oregon election law has long treated November general elections as the appropriate forum for high-impact statewide measures. SB 1599 departs from that standard in a way that disadvantages voter engagement rather than strengthening it.

This testimony is not about the merits of the transportation taxes themselves. It is about protecting the referendum process, maintaining public trust, and ensuring that decisions affecting all Oregonians are made with the fullest possible voter participation.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to reject SB 1599 and allow the referendum to proceed on the November 2026 ballot as originally intended.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Steve E.