

Submitter: Jo Rae Perkins
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Joint Special Committee On Referendum Petition
2026-302
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB1599

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

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,
I am Jo Rae Perkins, an Oregon voter and Albany resident in Linn County. I am testifying strongly in opposition to SB 1599, which would move the vote on Referendum Petition 2026-302 from the November 2026 general election to the May 19, 2026 primary.

I am extremely disappointed that Governor Kotek and Democratic legislative leaders would resort to such tactics against more than 250,000 Oregonians who signed the petition to refer portions of the 2025 special session transportation tax law to the ballot. The petition clearly stated that, if sufficient signatures were collected, the measure would appear on the November 2026 general election ballot. That is the expectation under which we gathered signatures and submitted them. How can the legislature now consider overriding that clear intent by shifting the vote to a lower-turnout primary?

This move appears driven by fear that the full voice of the people—your constituents—in a high-participation November election might be louder and more decisive than the legislative majority's position. Historical turnout data underscores this concern: the 2022 primary saw only about 37% participation, compared to 67% in the general election. By moving the referendum to May, you risk disenfranchising thousands of voters who would otherwise engage in November, effectively muting opposition to the tax increases.

Furthermore, declaring an "emergency" to make SB 1599 effective immediately upon passage is questionable at best. There is no genuine crisis here—only a self-imposed deadline to rush this through. Passing it with an emergency clause would severely limit the time for citizens to collect signatures and submit opposition statements for the voters' pamphlet. It would also place undue pressure on Secretary of State staff, who would face a compressed timeline to verify those signatures while handling candidate filings and other election preparations.

If Democratic leaders and supporters of the original transportation package are truly confident in its merits, why not welcome the broadest possible voter input in

November? What is there to fear from letting the people decide at the general election, as the petition process promised?

I urge you to vote NO on SB 1599. Honor the will of the more than 250,000 Oregonians who signed the petition in good faith. Keep the referendum on the November ballot where maximum participation can ensure a fair and representative outcome. Represent the people in your districts—not political strategy.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I respectfully request that this testimony be included in the official record.

Sincerely,
Jo Rae Perkins
Albany