

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

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing in firm and unequivocal opposition to SB 1599 and the attempt to move a duly approved referendum from the November general election ballot to the May primary ballot.

This action is an affront to the spirit and letter of the Oregon Constitution. The referendum process exists to ensure that the people retain a direct voice in the laws that govern them. Interfering with the timing of that vote after it has already been approved is not procedural housekeeping. It is a deliberate effort to weaken public participation and to manipulate the outcome by shifting the vote to an election with significantly lower turnout.

General elections exist for a reason. They are when the broadest and most representative cross section of Oregonians make their voices heard. Primary elections do not serve that purpose. Moving a referendum to the primary disenfranchises voters and silences communities who reliably participate in November but are far less likely to vote in May. That is not democracy. That is gamesmanship.

I was one of the volunteers who spent countless hours alongside hundreds of other Oregonians collecting signatures and engaging our communities so that the public could exercise its constitutional right to vote on this issue. We followed the rules. We did the work. Now the Legislature is attempting to change the rules after the fact because it does not like the prospect of public accountability.

That is unacceptable.

The anger many of us feel is justified. This bill signals a troubling willingness to erode democratic norms when the outcome may be inconvenient. If the Legislature can move a referendum today, it can do so again tomorrow. That precedent should alarm every Oregonian regardless of political affiliation.

I urge you to reject SB 1599 and to respect both the Constitution and the people of Oregon. The voters deserve a full and fair opportunity to be heard in the election where participation is highest and representation is strongest.

Anything less is a betrayal of public trust.