

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

Chair, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify.

At its core, this bill is not about policy substance—it is about whether the State of Oregon honors the will of its voters. The people of this state exercised one of the most fundamental tools available to them in a representative democracy: the referendum. Through that process, Oregonians made it unmistakably clear that they wanted this issue placed on the November 2026 general election ballot. That choice was not ambiguous, accidental, or marginal. It was a deliberate act of civic engagement, carried out according to the procedures established in our Constitution.

SB 1599 disregards that choice by moving the vote to the May 2026 primary election. Doing so undermines both the spirit and the purpose of the referendum process. The referendum exists precisely so that voters—not elected officials—decide whether a law should stand. When the electorate speaks through that mechanism, the role of government is to respect the decision, not to revise it.

The November general election is the moment when the broadest and most representative share of Oregonians participate. Historically, turnout in November far exceeds turnout in primary elections. That is not a partisan observation; it is a matter of public record. By shifting the vote to May, SB 1599 places a consequential statewide decision before a significantly smaller and less representative electorate. That outcome contradicts the very reason voters invoked the referendum in the first place: to ensure that this issue would be decided by the full voting public.

The state should not be in the business of narrowing participation on a question the people explicitly demanded be placed before the largest possible electorate. Respect for democratic norms requires more than procedural compliance—it requires honoring the intent behind the public's actions. The intent here was clear: Oregonians wanted this decision made in November.

Changing the election date after the people have spoken sets a troubling precedent. It signals that even when voters follow every rule, meet every threshold, and successfully refer a law, their decision can still be overridden by legislative action. That erodes trust in government and weakens the legitimacy of our democratic processes.

I urge the committee to reject SB 1599. Upholding the November election date is not

about supporting or opposing the underlying policy. It is about respecting the authority of the electorate and preserving the integrity of Oregon's referendum system. When voters take the extraordinary step of referring a law, the state has an obligation to listen—and to honor their decision.

Thank you for your consideration.