

Submitter: Justin Werner
On Behalf Of: Citizens of Lincoln County
Committee: Joint Special Committee On Referendum Petition
2026-302
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB1599

Testimony in Opposition to SB 1599

Submitted to: Joint Special Committee on Referendum Petition 2026-302

Date: February 8, 2026

Submitted by: Boiler Bay Beacon

Contact: Justin Werner, Boiler Bay Beacon Publisher

Email: justin@boilerbaybeacon.com

Organization: Boiler Bay Beacon – Independent Local News Media

Position: Oppose (as concerned observers of Oregon civic processes)

Dear Committee Members,

Boiler Bay Beacon is an independent news outlet serving communities along the Oregon coast and beyond, committed to fair, fact-based reporting on issues affecting Oregonians. We do not endorse candidates or ballot measures but prioritize transparency, public access to information, and the integrity of democratic processes.

We submit this testimony to express serious concern about SB 1599, which would shift the referendum on transportation tax and fee increases (Referendum Petition 2026-302) from the November 2026 general election to the May 2026 primary.

Over 250,000 Oregonians signed petitions in late 2025 to refer the matter to voters, with the clear expectation—reflected in petition materials and Oregon law—that the vote would occur in November, when turnout is historically highest. Moving the election date via separate legislation raises questions about voter expectations, turnout impacts, and precedent.

As journalists, our core role is to gather facts, ask tough questions, and inform the public so citizens can participate meaningfully. The accelerated timeline proposed by SB 1599 limits time for:

Thorough news coverage of the bill's implications, the underlying transportation package, and arguments on both sides.

Public awareness and education about the referendum itself.

Submission of balanced arguments to the voters' pamphlet.

Opportunities for reporters and citizens to pose informed questions to lawmakers, sponsors, and stakeholders.

This rushed process hinders our ability—and the public's—to fully understand and

scrutinize a significant policy change affecting taxes, fees, and infrastructure funding. Lower primary turnout could reduce overall voter participation on an issue that garnered massive petition support, potentially undermining the referendum process's purpose.

We urge the committee to preserve the November election date to maximize voter access, ensure adequate public discourse, and uphold trust in Oregon's initiative and referendum system. Boiler Bay Beacon stands ready to cover this issue fairly and will continue monitoring developments.

Thank you for considering this perspective from the perspective of independent local journalism.

Sincerely,
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