

Submitter: Richard De Witt
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Joint Special Committee On Referendum Petition
2026-302
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB1599

Chair and Members of the Committee,

I respectfully submit this testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 1599.

Over nearly 25 years of observation in Oregon's legislative process, I have too often witnessed the will of the people set aside when overwhelming public testimony conflicted with the priorities of the ruling party. However, I have never seen this disregard more clearly than during the passage of the recent transportation tax package.

More than 250,000 Oregonians signed a petition to refer that package to the ballot for the November 2026 general election, as clearly stated in the referendum petition. SB 1599 seeks to move that vote to the May 2026 primary election, not at the request of the people, but by legislative action. While this change may not ultimately alter the outcome, it once again undermines the expressed will of Oregon voters.

This bill appears to be part of a troubling pattern that seeks to subvert the democratic process in Oregon. The Governor delayed signing the transportation package in a manner that hindered signature collection. The Legislature was then asked to repeal the bill outright. Now, SB 1599 seeks to alter the election timeline chosen by the people themselves. These actions, taken together, give the appearance of political maneuvering rather than respect for Oregon's constitutional referendum process.

Of additional concern is that SB 1599 would significantly compress the timeline for citizen participation, leaving little to no time for individuals and organizations to submit statements for the voters' pamphlet. This effectively limits public voice at a critical moment.

Finally, SB 1599 proposes transferring responsibility for drafting the explanatory statement in the voters' pamphlet from the Secretary of State to a joint legislative committee. The wording of the explanatory statement plays a substantial role in how voters understand a measure. Shifting this authority raises serious questions about impartiality and intent, and further erodes public trust in the legislative body in Oregon, as does the unqualified and gratuitous use of the emergency clause.

Oregon's referendum process exists to allow citizens to hold their government accountable when they feel unheard. SB 1599 weakens that process and sets a

concerning precedent.

For these reasons, I urge the committee to vote NO on Senate Bill 1599.

Respectfully submitted,

Richard De Witt