

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

My name is Rebecca Benally, and I am a resident of Redmond, Oregon (House District 53 / Senate District 27). I am writing to strongly oppose Senate Bill 1599, which would move the vote on Referendum Petition 2026-302—the people's referendum on the transportation tax and fee increases from the 2025 special session—from the November 2026 general election to the May 19, 2026 primary. Over 250,000 Oregonians, including many in Central Oregon, signed this petition with the clear expectation and promise that the measure would appear on the November ballot, where historical voter turnout is significantly higher (often 2-3 times that of primaries). Shifting it to May would likely result in far lower participation, meaning a smaller, less representative portion of the electorate would decide on major statewide changes to fuel taxes, vehicle fees, registration costs, and payroll taxes that impact everyday Oregonians—especially in rural and driving-dependent areas like ours. This move undermines the intent of the petitioners and the spirit of Oregon's initiative and referendum process, as enshrined in Article IV, Section 1 of the Oregon Constitution, which reserves these powers directly to the people. Changing the election date midstream after signatures were gathered feels like an effort to limit public scrutiny, reduce debate time, and potentially avoid accountability for unpopular policies. It also risks eroding trust in our democratic system by appearing to prioritize political convenience over broad voter access.

The November ballot provides adequate time for education, arguments in the Voters' Pamphlet, and full participation. I urge the committee to reject SB 1599 and honor the petitioners' choice by keeping the referendum where it belongs—on the high-turnout November general election.

Thank you for considering my testimony. I am available for any questions and appreciate your service to our state.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Benally
Redmond, OR 97756
(541)279-6814
byklaerner@gmail.com