

To: Joint Special Committee on Referendum Petition 2026-302
From: Natasha Atkinson, Sutherlin, Oregon
Re: Opposition to SB 1599
Date: 02/09/2026

Chair, Vice-Chairs, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in **strong opposition to SB 1599**.

I am an Oregon voter deeply committed to transparency, fairness, and maintaining public trust in our electoral process. SB 1599 undermines these principles by moving the statewide vote on the transportation-related ballot measure—created by Referendum Petition 2026-302—from the November 2026 general election to the May 19, 2026, primary election. According to the bill text and official summaries, the legislation explicitly moves the election date for this referred measure and establishes special election procedures tied to the primary election date.

1. SB 1599 Reduces Voter Participation

Historically, Oregon's May primary elections draw significantly lower turnout than general elections. Moving such a major statewide decision—one that over 250,000 Oregonians helped send to the ballot through the referendum process—to a lower-turnout election dilutes the voices of ordinary voters. This concern has been publicly raised by legislators representing rural and coastal districts, who noted sharply reduced participation rates in primaries.

The Referendum process exists to ensure voters can check legislative actions. Changing the election date after citizens have already invested time and energy gathering signatures appears to circumvent that intent.

2. SB 1599 Creates Barriers to Equal Access to the Voters' Pamphlet

As noted by community advocates and legislative communications, the compressed timeline created by moving this referendum to May would make it nearly impossible for citizens to gather signatures and submit arguments for the Voters' Pamphlet in time.

The Voters' Pamphlet is one of the most widely read civic resources in Oregon. Restricting the public's ability to contribute—whether intentionally or as a side effect—significantly harms voter education and informed decision-making.

3. SB 1599 Erodes Public Trust

The timing and fast-tracking of SB 1599, as documented in the Oregon Legislature's own bill history, indicate the measure was introduced on February 5, 2026, and sent rapidly to committee with a public hearing scheduled just four days later.

Such accelerated movement on a bill that directly impacts the democratic process risks appearing as though the Legislature is manipulating election timing for political advantage. Whether or not that is the intent, the perception alone deepens mistrust between the public and state government.

4. Voters Expected Their Say in November—Changing the Date Violates That Trust

Referendum Petition 2026-302 was undertaken with the understanding that the vote would occur as part of the November general election, when the greatest number of Oregonians participated. Changing that date after signatures have been validated unravels the understanding between the state and its citizens. According to legislative materials, the Secretary of State has already verified the required signatures for the referendum.

Conclusion

For all of these reasons—reduced turnout, barriers to informational access, damage to public trust, and the disregard for voters who carried this referendum forward—I **urge the committee to reject SB 1599.**

Oregonians deserve a full, fair, and accessible vote on this major policy issue, and that vote belongs in the November general election.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Natasha Atkinson
Sutherlin, Oregon