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

SB 1599 is not about election administration—it is about overriding voters.

Oregonians exercised a fundamental democratic right by petitioning for this measure to appear on the November general election ballot, the election with the highest participation, broadest representation, and greatest legitimacy. That process was lawful, transparent, and successful. SB 1599 seeks to undo that outcome—not by persuading voters, but by changing the rules after the people have already spoken.

Moving a voter-petitioned measure from a general election to a low-turnout May election is not neutral. It is a deliberate choice with predictable consequences. May elections consistently see lower participation, narrower demographics, and reduced public engagement, particularly among working families, rural voters, and younger voters. To pretend otherwise is to ignore decades of Oregon election data.

The Legislature has the authority to regulate elections—but authority is not the same as legitimacy. When elected officials use procedural tools to dilute or reroute a measure they politically oppose, it undermines public trust in the initiative system itself. The message SB 1599 sends is unmistakable: when voters use the process correctly and still reach an inconvenient outcome, the Legislature will intervene.

That is not democracy. That is gatekeeping.

This bill also sets a dangerous precedent. If SB 1599 passes, no voter-initiated measure is truly secure. Any future initiative—regardless of subject or ideology—can be re-timed, re-framed, or re-engineered by a legislative majority unhappy with its chances in a fair, high-participation election. That should alarm every Oregonian, regardless of party.

The initiative process exists precisely to serve as a check on legislative power, not as something the Legislature may rearrange when politically expedient. Using statutory maneuvering to weaken that check is an abuse of process, even if it is technically lawful.

If proponents of SB 1599 believe voters are wrong, they should make their case to voters—in November, when the people of Oregon are most fully represented. Anything less signals a lack of confidence in the democratic process itself.

For these reasons, SB 1599 should be rejected—not because of the policy outcome it seeks to avoid, but because of the precedent it sets and the damage it does to voter trust, democratic legitimacy, and the integrity of Oregon’s initiative system.