

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

Oregon State Senate  
Joint Special Committee on Referendum Petition 2026-302  
900 Court St NE  
Salem, OR 97301

Re: Strong Opposition to Senate Bill 1599 – Do Not Move the Referendum Vote to May

Dear Senators and Committee Members,

I am writing as a registered voter and resident of Portland to strongly oppose Senate Bill 1599, which seeks to move the vote on Referendum Petition 2026-302 (the citizen-initiated referendum on the 2025 transportation tax and fee increases) from the November 2026 general election to the May 19, 2026 primary election.

More than 250,000 Oregonians — including many in my community — took the time and effort to sign petitions to qualify this referendum for the ballot. They did so with the clear understanding and expectation, as reflected in the petition process and state law, that the people would have their say in the November general election, when voter turnout is historically highest and broadest. This bill represents an unprecedented and unnecessary interference in that democratic process.

Moving the vote to the May primary would:

- Suppress voter participation. Primary elections see significantly lower turnout than general elections, especially among working families, independents, and those who only vote in November. This change would effectively silence thousands of voices that the petitioners worked hard to include.

- Undermine the will of the people. The referendum petition was filed and qualified based on the established timeline for a November vote. Changing the rules after signatures have been gathered and verified appears to be a politically motivated maneuver to reduce the chances of repeal by limiting exposure and turnout.

Oregonians deserve the full, fair opportunity to weigh in on a major tax increase — including the 6-cent gas tax hike, higher vehicle registration and title fees, and the payroll tax for transit — without the goalposts being moved mid-process.

- Set a dangerous precedent. If the Legislature can retroactively alter the election date for a qualified referendum, it erodes public trust in the initiative and referendum process, one of the core pillars of Oregon’s direct democracy tradition.

Supporters of SB 1599 have argued for earlier “certainty” on transportation funding, but that cannot justify overriding the explicit choice of over a quarter-million citizens who demanded a November vote. If the underlying transportation package needs

adjustments, that should be addressed through repeal or revision after voters have spoken — not by manipulating the ballot date to influence the outcome.

I urge you to vote NO on SB 1599 and respect the integrity of the referendum process. Honor the petitioners and all Oregon voters by keeping this measure on the November 2026 ballot as originally qualified.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I ask that this letter be included in the official record for SB 1599. I am available to provide additional testimony if needed.