

County Commissioners
Colm Willis, Chair
Kevin Cameron
Danielle Bethell



**Chief Administrative
Officer**
Jan Fritz

MARION COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

February 9, 2026

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

Re: Opposition to SB 1599 and Efforts to Move the Referendum Vote

Co-Chair Jama, Co-Chair Gomberg, and Members of the Committee:

I write to you today in strong opposition to Senate Bill 1599 and any legislative action that would move the vote on Referendum Petition 2026-302 from the November 2026 general election to the May primary.

More than 250,000 Oregonians signed the referendum petition to ensure that voters would have their say on the transportation tax and fee increases passed during the special session. The Oregon Secretary of State has verified that the petition has qualified for the November 2026 ballot. Moving the vote now is in direct opposition to the will of those 250,000 Oregonians who lawfully exercised their constitutional right to refer this legislation to the people.

Under Oregon law and long-standing precedent, referendums that qualify for the ballot default to the next general election unless the Legislature affirmatively sets another date. Voters signed this petition with the understanding that their efforts would place the measure before the broadest electorate possible in November 2026. Changing that date after the fact undermines public trust in the legislative process and sends a troubling message: that when citizens follow the rules, the rules may be changed to suit political convenience.

The public response to SB 1599 has been overwhelming. Thousands of Oregonians submitted written testimony, with the vast majority opposing the proposal to accelerate the vote. Testimony at your recent hearing echoed a common refrain: "Oregonians have spoken." While there are legitimate concerns about funding certainty for the Oregon Department of Transportation and the projected budget gap, those fiscal challenges do not justify diminishing the integrity of the referendum process.

Legality alone is not enough. The Legislature may have the technical authority to move the election date, but legality is not the same as legitimacy. The referendum power exists precisely so that citizens may serve as a check on legislative action. When over a quarter million Oregonians engage in that process, their collective voice deserves respect, not procedural maneuvering.

Primary elections historically see significantly lower voter turnout than general elections. Moving this vote to May would limit participation and reduce the number of Oregonians

weighing in on a matter that directly affects their pocketbooks, their communities, and the future of our transportation system. A question of this magnitude should be decided when voter participation is highest.

As a County Commissioner representing residents who will bear the impact of these taxes and fees, I believe deeply in the importance of maintaining public confidence in our democratic institutions. If the Legislature alters the timing of this vote after the referendum has qualified, it risks further eroding that trust.

I respectfully urge the Committee to reject SB 1599 and allow Referendum Petition 2026-302 to proceed to the November 2026 ballot as anticipated when Oregonians signed the petition.

Thank you for your consideration and for your service to the people of Oregon.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Danielle Bethell", written over a horizontal line.

Danielle Bethell
Commissioner