

Opposition to SB 1599 – Protect Voter Rights and the November Election

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

I am writing in strong opposition to **SB 1599**, which would move the voter-approved referendum on Oregon's transportation tax package from the **November 2026 general election** to the **May 2026 primary election**.

This bill represents unacceptable political gamesmanship and a direct attempt to undermine the will of Oregon voters.

More than **250,000 Oregonians** signed a valid referendum petition with the clear expectation—and legal understanding—that this vote would occur during the **November general election**, when voter participation is highest and when all voters, regardless of party affiliation, can fully participate. Changing the election date after the signatures have been gathered fundamentally alters the rules mid-stream and erodes trust in Oregon's election process.

Moving this vote to the May primary is not a neutral administrative change. Primary elections historically see **significantly lower turnout**, particularly among independent and non-affiliated voters. This shift would effectively silence large portions of the electorate and skew the outcome of a decision that affects all Oregonians.

Additionally, SB 1599 makes it far more difficult—if not practically impossible—for opponents of the \$4.3 billion gas tax and fee package to gather the required signatures and submit arguments for inclusion in the Voters' Pamphlet. The Voters' Pamphlet is a cornerstone of informed civic participation in Oregon, and restricting access to it further compounds the unfairness of this proposal.

The creation of a special joint committee and the rushed process surrounding SB 1599 only heighten concerns that this bill is designed to be fast-tracked with minimal public scrutiny.

Regardless of one's position on the transportation tax itself, **changing election rules to favor one political outcome is wrong**. Oregon's referendum process exists to give citizens a meaningful check on government power—not to be manipulated when the results may be inconvenient.

I respectfully urge you to **reject SB 1599** and allow the referendum to proceed as intended in the **November 2026 general election**, where voter participation is broad, fair, and consistent with the expectations of the citizens who exercised their constitutional right to referendum.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

Sincerely,
Steve

