



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

Oregon Freedom Coalition (OFC) is recognized by the Internal Revenue Service as a 501(c)(4) nonprofit organization. OFC is dedicated to the promotion of accountability, affordability, better-education, business-friendliness, healthiness, and safety throughout the State of Oregon. The mission of No Tax Oregon, a project of OFC, is to lower Oregonians' taxes one bad tax at a time.

Oregon Freedom Coalition and No Tax Oregon are strongly opposed to SB 1599, which would move Referendum Petition 2026-302 from the November elections to the May elections.

Historically, May elections have significantly lower voter turnout than November elections. While numerous excuses have been made as to why the Referendum should be moved, the intent is clear: Governor Tina Kotek and the 83rd Oregon Legislative Assembly intends to ignore and silence the voice of Oregon voters on the devastating tax and fee increases that they said "no" to multiple times throughout 2025. Moving the Referendum to the May ballot will stifle the democratic process. The Committee should vote "no" on SB 1599 and ensure the democratic process is carried out to the fullest extent possible and with the largest number of Oregon voters guaranteed to have a say in whether their taxes go up.

Unfortunately, the Governor and the Legislature have a poor track record of listening to Oregonians. SB 1599 is the fourth attempt to ignore and silence Oregonians in the last year. The first attempt came during the 2025 Regular Session, when lawmakers held closed-door negotiations and waited until the final days of session to attempt to ram tax and fee hikes through the legislature over the voice of the People. Thankfully, those efforts failed.

Determined to raise Oregonians' taxes, Governor Kotek called an emergency session for September. In spite of thousands of Oregonians submitting testimony in opposition, the Governor and the Legislature ignored the voice of the People and raised their taxes.

Once the tax and fee hikes were passed, Governor Kotek then waited to sign the legislation into law, stifling democracy and giving voters less time to sign the referendum petition that would finally give the voters their voice back. The delay was



useless. An unprecedented 250,000 Oregonians made their voices heard by signing the referendum petition with the understanding that the vote would occur in the November 2026 when they could also hold their legislators and their governor accountable for not listening to them.

And now, the Legislature wants to move the election date so that Oregonians again do not have a voice.

The reasoning behind the latest attempt are the same tired arguments made for raising ignoring the People and raising taxes in the first place. Proponents argue the vote needs to occur sooner rather than later as the budget situation with the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) is not good. Moving the election would supposedly provide early clarity on the budget crisis and what should be done to fix it.

But what happens when the tax and fee increases fail on the May ballot? The Legislature will still need to find a solution to the ODOT budget crisis without raising taxes and fees. This is a job that can be done during the 2026 Regular Session in order to avoid an Emergency Session. Making the appropriate budget changes to realign ODOT priorities with its core mission brings stability to an agency that desperately needs it. In that case, there is no need to move the election as the budget crisis will be solved. Furthermore, should the voters approve the tax and fee increases—however unlikely—in November, the 84th Oregon Legislative Assembly is perfectly capable of deciding how exactly the revenue generated should be used.

Proponents of SB 1599, such as the SEIU Local 503, have also engaged in endless fear mongering. One fear mongering tactic targets ODOT employees, making them believe their job security is at risk without the funding from the tax and fee increases. The argument then follows that moving the election to May would guarantee these workers keep their jobs.

However, this was the same argument for passing the Transportation Reinvestment Package (TRIP), which turned into HB 2025 and other bills, during the 2025 Regular Session. The Legislature failed to pass any comprehensive funding, and, despite threats from the Governor that ODOT road and maintenance crews would be laid off in July, no layoffs occurred. The Governor and the SEIU used these faithful public servants' livelihoods as a political tool to bludgeon lawmakers into passing the tax and fee hikes



and as a way to guilt-trip Oregon taxpayers into taking the financial hit. The threats of layoffs worked on lawmakers, but the taxpayers saw through the lies, as did ODOT employees. Over a quarter million Oregonians signed the referendum, with many ODOT employees signing as well.

The other fear mongering tactic relates to road safety. Proponents of SB 1599 claim that moving the elections helps stabilize ODOT's budget earlier in the year, thus reducing the amount of road deaths in Oregon. The implication here is that many roadway deaths occur due to poor road conditions and that without immediate budget stabilization, ODOT cannot perform its duties to keep roads in good condition, thus leading to poorer road conditions and more roadway deaths statewide.

There is no indication this line of reasoning is accurate. No data exists to indicate an unusually high number of Oregonians are dying due to poor roadway conditions. Rather, most of the data on roadway fatalities in Oregon indicate the causes are due to operator error.

Given these arguments are easily rebutted, the true intent of SB 1599 becomes obvious. Governor Tina Kotek and the 83rd Oregon Legislative Assembly want to avoid being held accountable for ignoring and silencing Oregonians. They believe they know what is best for Oregonians' pocketbooks, and they wish to avoid being told they are wrong by the people who actually own those pocketbooks.

The voters should vote in November, but heed my warning: whether May or November, Oregonians will not forget the attempts made to silence them.

I urge the Committee to ensure the People have a voice and vote "no" on SB 1599.

Thank you for your consideration,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nick Stark'.

**Nick Stark**

Executive Director  
Oregon Freedom Coalition