

Submitter: Barbara Kahl
On Behalf Of: Tax Payers
Committee: Joint Special Committee On Referendum Petition
2026-302
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB1599

Opposition to SB 1599 and HB 3991: Preserving Public Trust in Oregon's Democratic Process

As an Oregonian concerned with the integrity of our democratic institutions, I strongly oppose Senate Bill 1599 (SB 1599), which seeks to manipulate the voter referendum on key provisions of House Bill 3991 (HB 3991)—the 2025 transportation package imposing a 6-cent-per-gallon gas tax increase, doubled transit taxes, and hikes in vehicle fees.

This maneuver by Democratic lawmakers represents a willful attempt to undermine the will of the people, erode public trust in the legislature, and subvert the constitutional referendum process. Here are the key facts supporting this opposition:

- 1. Manipulation of Voter Intent and Process:** Over 250,000 Oregonians signed Referendum Petition 2026-302, qualifying it for the November 2026 general election ballot—the date explicitly understood and stated during the signature drive. SB 1599 would shift this to the May 2026 primary, rewriting the rules AFTER the fact. This not only disregards the petitioners' expectations but "fundamentally alters the balance of power between the legislature and the people," as testified by Rep. Ed Diehl, co-chief petitioner and a gubernatorial candidate. Such post-hoc changes signal that the legislature views citizen initiatives as obstacles to be circumvented, fostering distrust.
- 2. Suppression of Voter Turnout:** Oregon primaries consistently see far lower participation than general elections. For instance, the 2024 general election had 75.4% turnout among registered voters, while the 2024 primary in key counties like Multnomah hovered around 37%. Moving the referendum to May exploits this disparity, potentially disenfranchising broader voter groups, including independents and moderates who turn out in higher numbers for generals. Critics argue this is a cynical ploy to stack the deck in favor of the tax package by limiting input from a representative electorate. I5s called Taxation without Representation.
- 3. Overwhelming Public Rejection:** During the February 9, 2026, public hearing on SB 1599, 99% of over 4,000 written testimonies opposed the bill, with thousands more voicing concerns in person. Opponents, from Libertarians to everyday citizens, warned of legal challenges and accused lawmakers of "rigging the system" to avoid accountability on an unpopular tax. Even supporters admit the move prioritizes

bureaucratic "certainty" over democratic legitimacy.

This legislative overreach on SB 1599 not only delays resolution on HB 3991's burdensome taxes but intentionally erodes faith in government by treating the people's voice as malleable. Oregonians deserve transparency and respect for their constitutional rights—not gamesmanship.

I urge lawmakers to reject SB 1599 and allow the referendum to proceed as intended in November 2026, restoring trust in our system.