

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

Dear Members of the Joint Special Committee on Referendum Petition 2026-302,

I am a resident of Rockaway Beach (Tillamook County), Oregon, writing to strongly oppose Senate Bill 1599. This bill would move the voter referendum on the 2025 transportation package (Referendum Petition 2026-302) from the November 2026 general election to the May 2026 primary election.

Over 250,000 Oregonians, including many in my community, worked hard to gather signatures and qualify this referendum for the ballot. We did so with the clear understanding — based on the petition process and standard practice — that the vote would occur in November, when voter turnout is highest and the broadest cross-section of Oregonians participates.

Changing the date now would undermine the integrity of the referendum process and the power of the people to hold the Legislature accountable. Primary elections typically see much lower turnout, especially among independent and non-affiliated voters, which could suppress the voice of everyday Oregonians on this important issue. Many of us who signed the petition feel this change betrays the effort we put in and appears designed to influence the outcome rather than let a full, fair vote happen as originally certified.

The transportation tax increases (including the 6-cent gas tax hike and higher vehicle fees) already burden working and retired families, rural drivers, and small businesses in places like Tillamook County, where we rely heavily on personal vehicles for work, groceries, and medical care. Oregonians deserve the chance to vote on these measures in the November general election, as promised and as expected.

I respectfully urge you to reject SB 1599 and allow the referendum to proceed as scheduled in November 2026. Respecting the will of the people who signed the petition is essential to maintaining trust in our democratic process.

Thank you for considering my views. I ask that this testimony be included in the official record for SB 1599.

Sincerely,

Robert Rathgeber
Rockaway Beach, Oregon