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To the Co-Chairs and members of the General Administration and Elections Committee:

Testimony in OPPOSITION of SB 1146 An Act Concerning Cross Endorsements

Submitted by Cynthia Jennings, City Councilor, Working Families - Hartford

Senator Musto, Representative Jutila, Senator Meyer, Representative Lesser, Senator McLachlan, Representative Hwang and Members of the GAE Committee, thank you for raising the issue of cross endorsements and allowing me to speak on it today.

SB 1146 in its language calls to repeal Section 9-453t of the Connecticut general statutes to end cross endorsements of candidates and require that only candidates enrolled in any specific party be allowed to be endorsed by that party. As an elected official who has run and won on a minor party line in a city that is heavily skewed to only one of the two major parties, I find any elimination or modification of the current system to be detrimental to voters.

Connecticut has lead the way in creating ways to engage and retain new and unaffiliated voters. With the recently passed Early Voting Laws and minority party's ability to cross endorse, new and emerging electors are given more incentive to cast their votes at the polls. Although some may feel that the two party system status quo is enough, we must be clear in acknowledging that low-income communities, ethnic minorities, and people of color have statistically and historically been under represented at the polls. Part of the reason for that is clear: these groups have all felt under or misrepresented by both Democrats and Republicans at times, and providing alternatives to keep these voting groups engaged is an important task of our government that we can not dismiss or take likely.

In my professional capacity, as a civil rights attorney, I am constantly at battle with injustices that plague people in communities of color. In my membership with the NAACP and the Greater Hartford African-American Alliance, we are engaged in ongoing discussions and action of how to combat bad legislation in other states that have wrongly launched attacks to roll back voter rights of these communities. Until the arrival of SB 1146, I had not anticipated that Connecticut would ever be subjected to such backwards-thinking legislation.

As the only woman elected to a nine-member city council representing a minority party, and being an African American, I am in the "minority check-box" in almost every way that can be imagined, politically and beyond and it is clear to me that SB 1146 is a bad bill. Electors vote to elect people to represent their values; not parties – confusing the two is a dangerous and slippery slope that infringes on civil justices and liberties that I would suggest this committee and the General Assembly, make every effort to avoid. Connecticut has a strong history of strengthening voter rights

and making the ballot open and accessible for all eligible voters to engage. Any calls to repeal these rights are a step back that our state cannot afford to take. In my testimony I am asking you to do the right thing and vote against SB 1146.

Thank you,

Attorney Cynthia Jennings