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

Testimony in opposition of SB 1146, An Act Concerning Cross Endorsements

Submitted by Ralph Ford and Tom Coble of the Bridgeport Protect Our Voting Rights Coalition

Senator Musto, Representative Jutila, Senator Meyer, Representative Lesser, Senator McLachlan, Representative Hwang and Members of the GAE Committee, thank you for allowing us to speak today.

When we heard about this bill we were concerned about the integrity and vitality of our elections, just as we were when we heard about the proposed Charter Reform initiative in Bridgeport. As you know, if it had passed, reforming Bridgeport's charter would have eliminated the elected Board of Education, and instead replaced it with a Board that was appointed by the Mayor. We worked to defeat that reform because we believe fair and open elections, with as many citizens participating as possible, are good for our cities, and our state. That is also why we are testifying against SB 1146, which would eliminate the ability of a political party to cross-endorse candidates.

While the proposed charter reform in Bridgeport and eliminating cross-endorsements are certainly different, they both harm our electoral process, and thereby our systems of government and our democracy. Both limit the choices of voters, by eliminating an office to vote for, and by eliminating a way to vote for a candidate that sends them a clear message. Both erode accountability to voters by shifting power to political insiders. Both show a callous distrust in voters.

One of the most troubling aspects of eliminating cross endorsements is that it has the potential to erode participation in our democracy by harming minor parties. Strong minor parties are an important part of our state's democracy. Polling shows that the people who are least likely to vote are most interested in minor parties, including young people, low-income voters and immigrants. Minor parties can serve to turn out those new voters because they speak directly to the issues they are interested in. The United States ranks 120 out of 169 countries in electoral participation among registered voters. We should not do anything that might further alienate and disengage voters. Our goal should be to increase voter turn out, not drive it down.

Cross endorsements also give a voice to voters who have traditionally been marginalized by the political process. Minor parties that can cross endorse candidates of major parties have a productive way to contribute to that candidate's election. In turn, candidates can see exactly what issues voters care about, thus elevating their values and concerns. A system without cross endorsements leaves minor parties with very few options. Either they run their own candidate, and risk helping elect the candidate furthest from their own

views, or they must stay out of the race. Cross endorsement allows those minor party voters to make their voice heard and vote for a candidate closer to their views, and provides a meaningful way to participate in the process.

We urge you oppose S.B. 1146 and preserve cross endorsements so that our democracy here in Connecticut can continue to thrive and best represent all our citizen's views.

Thank you,

Ralph Ford and Tom Coble