Government Administration and Elections Committee  
Friday, February 28  
Testimony in Support of SB 233, SJ 15, and HB 5278

Senator Flexer, Representative Fox, and members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee:

My name is Stephen Anderson, and I am the President of CSEA SEIU Local 2001. CSEA represents over 25,000 state employees, municipal employees, board of education employees, school bus drivers, family child care providers, and retired public employees in Connecticut. For over 70 years, CSEA members have fought for better lives for themselves, their families, and every resident of our great state. It is my privilege to offer the following testimony on behalf of our members about several critical pieces of legislation supported by CSEA: Senate Bill 233: AN ACT CONCERNING ELECTIONS, Senate Joint Resolution 15: RESOLUTION PROPOSING AN AMENDMENT TO THE STATE CONSTITUTION TO PERMIT EARLY VOTING, and House Bill 5278: AN ACT REVISING CERTAIN ABSENTEE VOTING STATUTES.

The vitality of our democracy is dependent on engaged citizens and the right to vote. As such, our democracy should be as accessible as possible so that any citizen who wishes to participate is able. Limiting all 2.4 million registered voters in Connecticut to cast their votes on a single Tuesday causes two distinct problems. First, the reality for many of our state’s residents is that limiting voting to 14 hours on a single day prevents some individuals from voting. Schedules are busy, unforeseen conflicts arise, and other obligations can be serious hurdles to voting between 6 AM and 8 PM on what is a work day for many people. Secondly, problems arise when so many people try to cast their ballots on the same day. In 2016 and 2018, long lines overwhelmed polling places in New Haven. And in 2010, Connecticut didn’t know the results of the gubernatorial election for almost a week after 12 out of 23 precincts in Bridgeport ran out of ballots. Election Day registration, automatic voter registration, early voting, and improved access to absentee ballots will make elections in Connecticut better, fairer, and a more accurate reflection of the will of the voters.

SB 233 helps improve Connecticut’s system of Election Day voter registration, makes it easier for formerly incarcerated individuals to exercise their voting rights, and allows for automatic voter registration. CSEA wholeheartedly supports these provisions because the robust participation of eligible voters is necessary to a functioning democracy.

CSEA supports SJ 15 because it is long past time to allow Connecticut voters to cast their ballots in a way that works better with their busy, mobile lives. Not everybody can take time off from their work schedule to vote, wait several hours to cast a ballot, or return to vote when a precinct runs out of printed ballots. If we value the integrity of our democratic process, we should take steps to ensure that our voting is open and accessible. Allowing early voting over several days would be beneficial to our democracy. Nationwide, an estimated 47 million American voters cast their ballots before Election Day in 2016 — more than 1/3rd of the entire electorate. Connecticut voters deserve the same opportunity.

And, CSEA also supports HB 5278 because in the 21st century, there is no good reason why Connecticut should limit voting to a single day. More than 33 states already permit early voting, and 27 states will mail an absentee ballot to any eligible voter who requests one. We are very supportive of instituting no-fault absentee voting in Connecticut. Currently, registered voters are only able to obtain an absentee ballot if they are active service in the armed forces, will be absent from town during all hours of voting, are sick or physically disabled, a member of a religion that forbids secular (non-religious) activity on that day, or working as an election official on that day. We should institute no-fault absentee voting so that any citizen who wants an absentee ballot can get one and not limit access to absentee ballots.

I thank you for hearing my testifying and urge the committee to support SB 233, SJ 15, and HB 5278.

Stephen Anderson  
President, CSEA SEIU Local 2001