February 28, 2020
Rob Baril, President
SEIU District 1199 New England
Before the GAE Committee

In SUPPORT of SB 233: AN ACT CONCERNING ELECTIONS

Good Afternoon Senator Flexer, Representative Fox and members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee. My name is Rob Baril and I am president of the Service Employees International Union, District 1199 New England. Our union represents 26,000 health care workers across the public and private sectors in Connecticut. Today, I am submitting testimony in support of SB 233. District 1199 strongly supports legislation that expands voter rights and makes it easier for Connecticut residents to vote.

SB 233 is the next step in securing and modernizing our elections in Connecticut. Currently, eligible citizens are already electronically registered at the DMV unless they opt out. SB 233 codifies this practice into law and upgrades it by authorizing Automated/Electronic Voter Registration at federally designated voter registration agencies like DSS, Access Health CT, UCONN and other state universities, colleges, and other government entities. The Center for American Progress estimates 245,396 new voters would be registered in the first year alone. This matters because District 1199 members most often work around the clock for multiple jobs, or are mandated for multiple days in a row. SB 233 would make registering to vote something that wouldn’t require an extra trip.

In addition, SB 233 restores the right to vote upon release from incarceration or assignment to a halfway house. The majority of our members – working in state human services, nursing homes, group homes, hospitals, and home care – are women of color. Connecticut, like every other state in this nation, disproportionately arrests and incarcerates Black and brown people, which disproportionately harms our members’ families and communities.

Connecticut residents with a criminal record face over 600 systemic barriers to re-integration into society – through limited access to housing, loans, employment, and education – SB 233 would ease one of the obstacles that formerly incarcerated individuals face to re-integration and would be a significant step towards addressing the long-term damages of mass incarceration in our members’ communities.

Connecticut has sought to become a “Second Chance Society.” Without expanding voting rights in Connecticut, residents with a criminal record cannot exercise their voice, and our democracy is left to the lucky, wealthy few. District 1199 believes that an inclusive process builds an inclusive society and we proudly urge the committee to advance this very important piece of legislation. Thank you for your time.