Dear Senator Flexer, Representative Fox, and members of the Government Administration and Finance Committee,

My name is Wildaliz Bermúdez. I am a Hartford Councilwoman and I submit this testimony to you today in support of SB233 - An Act Concerning Elections. This bill would take two important steps towards a more perfect democracy - by formalizing a system of automatic/electronic voter registration and restoring voting rights to previously incarcerated individuals upon release from incarceration or assignment to a halfway house.

Automatically registering voters while they are already doing activity in which they interact with our state government, such as getting their driver's license or enrolling in healthcare, makes our government run more efficiently and makes voting easier. This is a common sense policy that has already proved itself effective in states like Oregon, where their Automatic Voter Registration law led to 375,000 new voters in 18 months. In order for us to promote true engagement in our political system, we must remove as many barriers to voting as possible. This is particularly important in communities such as my own, where generations of political inaction and a lack of intentional engagement have created disillusionment with our electoral system - we must be able to meet people where they are at if we are to ever restore faith in our state and local governments. Passing automatic voter registration would move us closer to creating a culture of participation, save money for our municipalities, and reduce friction in the registration process for our future generations.

With this same commitment to democracy in mind, we must move forward in the way that we acknowledge the rights, humanity, and personal growth of our re-entry population by allowing them the right to vote upon their return to their communities. When we prevent someone from voting, we are saying that their perspective and experiences do not matter, that they are beneath us both in voice and value. This philosophy is both cruel and incorrect, all people have inherent value and that is a fundamental idea of democracy - the reason why we even have an electoral process to begin with. Each member of this committee was elected by people in their communities, people with their own ideas, with their own families and loved ones, and with their own set of past mistakes. You would not strip those in your community of their right to vote, and we should not do so to individuals who have served their time within our problematic criminal justice system. Parolees trying to return to a life of normalcy are amongst the most vulnerable populations. The stress of securing housing, finding work, and staying away from toxic situations should be enough to overcome without the feeling of helplessness towards the future of your community. I have a large amount of respect for the members of my Hartford community working to correct their mistakes and improve the lives of their families a little bit every day, and I hope that you will stand with me in welcoming them back into our democracy by passing S.B. 233.

Thank you for your time,
Wildaliz Bermúdez
Hartford City Councilwoman