Testimony by Carl Chisem, President
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S.B. 233 AN ACT CONCERNING ELECTIONS

Government Administration and Elections Committee Public Hearing
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Senator Flexer, Representative Fox, Senator Sampson, Representative France and distinguished members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee. My name is Carl Chisem and I am President of the Connecticut Employees Union Independent, SEIU Local 511. We represent over 6,000 active and retired blue collar maintenance and service State workers. Our members provide valuable services within our state facilities. They cook, clean, repair, maintain and deliver in Connecticut’s State buildings, hospitals, college campuses, airports, roads, bridges and parks. They represent the true diversity of our great State.

I submit this testimony in support of S.B. 233 – An Act Concerning Elections. Voting is a fundamental right that is one of the major forms of communication between citizens and their elected officials. Unfortunately, too many hardworking Americans face tremendous barriers that interfere with their ability to cast their ballot. We should be making it easier, not harder, for eligible citizens to exercise their right to vote. Automatic Voter Registration (AVR) streamlines and simplifies the way we register to vote. It modernizes the voter registration process and keeps voter rolls secure and up to date. Eligible citizens are already electronically registered at the DMV unless they have opted out. AVR would automatically register any eligible citizen during their interactions with certain state agencies, like DMV and DSS. Those transactions would also update eligible voters’ addresses, so they do not need to re-register when they move. That means more accurate voter rolls, registration that is more convenient for eligible citizens, elections that are more streamlined, and time and money saved for municipalities.

AVR uses information and documents that citizens already provide to government offices to verify their eligibility to vote. This information is electronically transferred to the Secretary of the State’s office and the local registrar of voters. Eligible voters have the option to indicate a party reference or opt-out of registration. AVR saves time and money for municipal workers as the many challenges they face on election days will be significantly reduced. Moving from a paper-based registration also reduces the staff time needed to do data entry. Registrars and poll workers can instead spend their time making sure elections are run efficiently and securely.

Beyond saving time and money, AVR helps people exercise their right to vote. Many states that have implemented AVR have seen a significant increase in the registration of eligible voters. In Connecticut, the Center of American Progress estimates 245,396 new voters would be registered in the first year. Election day lines, delays and barriers to voting would be reduced thus encouraging more people to go out and vote.

I ask that you support S.B. 233.

Thank you.