TESTIMONY IN FAVOR OF BILLS:

S.B. No. 233 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING ELECTIONS

S.J. No. 15 RESOLUTION PROPOSING AN AMENDMENT TO THE STATE CONSTITUTION TO PERMIT EARLY VOTING.

H.B. No. 5277 (RAISED) AN ACT DECREASING FEES FOR COPYING PUBLIC RECORDS UNDER THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT

Honorable GAE Committee:

Please accept the following written testimony regarding; S.B. No. 233 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING ELECTIONS; S.J. No. 15 RESOLUTION PROPOSING AN AMENDMENT TO THE STATE CONSTITUTION TO PERMIT EARLY VOTING.; and, H.B. No. 5277 (RAISED) AN ACT DECREASING FEES FOR COPYING PUBLIC RECORDS UNDER THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT.

I ask the committee to vote in favor of S.B. No. 233 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING ELECTIONS. This bill has a number of important provisions that protect voting rights and democracy. In particular, we must ensure that people who want to participate in same day voter registration be given every opportunity to do so. Voters in line by 8pm already have the right to cast their vote; it makes sense that those in line before 8pm to register to vote are able to register and cast their votes as well. I actually thought this provision was already a law, so I am pleased that the committee is working to ensure that this process is debated and hopefully moves forward.

Additionally, the restoration of voting rights for those with a conviction on parole are extremely important. According to the CT Department of Corrections, there are 4,745 people on parole as of November 2019. According to the Sentencing Project (2020), of those who have been imprisoned, the rate of African Americans/Blacks is 1,392 (per 100,000) compared to 583 (per 100,000) for Hispanics and 148 (per 100,000) for Whites according to 2014 data. The Black:White ratio is 9.4 to 1 whereas the ratio of Hispanic:White ratio is 3.9 to 1. The clear racial disparities in our imprisonment practices is an issue that Connecticut has been seeking to address. Ensuring that people on parole have the right to vote is another step towards reducing racial and ethnic disparities. If we want to ensure the successful transition of formerly incarcerated individuals back into our communities, we must give them a stake in being part of the community. Voting is an essential right and means of engagement. The denial of a person’s right to vote is a continuation of voter suppression and Jim crow practices that have no place in Connecticut.

In the same vein, I ask the committee to pass forward S.J. No. 15 RESOLUTION PROPOSING AN AMENDMENT TO THE STATE CONSTITUTION TO PERMIT EARLY VOTING which would permit a Constitutional amendment for early voting in CT. This is another issue of promoting democracy. We cannot purport to be a democracy when so many of our citizenry are unable to vote for any number of reasons. Connecticut would not be the first to have early voting. This would not be groundbreaking, but it would be good practice.
Lastly, and while unrelated to the others, please pass H.B. No. 5277 (RAISED) AN ACT DECREASING FEES FOR COPYING PUBLIC RECORDS UNDER THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT. Government in the spirit of transparency should not be trying to make money off of people who are seeking public information. The cost prohibitive practices of asking for .50 per copy have been a means to dissuade people from being able to afford access to information. These costs replicate a pay to play system that advantages those who have the money. In this day and age when we have the technology to scan documents and most documents are electronic, the idea of charging people to access information is archaic. I understand some will cite administrative costs and burden, but these costs are part of doing business and should not be used as a prohibitive tool for making access to public information challenging and complicated for the public.

Thank you for considering my testimony.

Best,

Cindy Dubuque-Gallo, LMSW

Hartford, CT