Dear Government Administration and Election Committee Chairs Flexer and Fox, Vice-Chairs Haskell and Winkler, Ranking Members Sampson and France, and distinguished members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Sierra Club and our more than 40,000 members and supporters in Connecticut, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on Senate Bill 233, An Act Concerning Elections.

Sierra Club Connecticut strongly supports Senate Bill 233. Automatic voter registration will simplify and streamline the way we register to vote here in Connecticut. It both modernizes voter registration and keeps voter rolls secure and up to date. We are already electronically registered to vote at the DMV, this bill would authorize automatic voter registration at other federally designated areas, such as DSS, Access Health CT and Medicaid, UCONN and other state universities and colleges, making it easier for more people to register to vote.

This bill will substantially expand voting rights, particularly for women, minorities, and lower income citizens. The Center for American Progress estimates 245,396 new voters would be registered in the first year alone. Expanding our electorate and making registration as easy as possible for as many people as possible enhances our democracy and brings new voices into the political process. These newly registered voters will be invaluable in helping to address the concerns of their communities, inequity in our society, and environmental injustice. In a country and a state that prides itself on being representative of ALL people, the goal of expanding voting rights should be a high priority. Particularly because the Voting Rights Act remains gutted at the national level to this day.

The practical reasons for this bill are numerous as well. This can help reduce the long election day lines due to same day registrations. It also saves money in labor by switching from paper to electronic registrations. And finally, eliminating outdated addresses and duplicate registrations enhances and secures the integrity of our elections which is particularly crucial at this time.

This bill also helps to expand and enhance our democracy by restoring voting rights to felons upon their release from incarceration or assignment to a halfway house. This goes a long way to both help reintegrate people into the community and invest in the duties of citizenship. Folks that have served their time and have been rehabilitated deserve to be able to re-enter society and contribute. This will also help to give voice to
a segment of the population long silenced and be a step in the right direction to correct some of the injustices of our current prison system.

Thank you for your attention to these important issues and for consideration of our testimony.

Sincerely,

Ann Gadwah, Chapter Chair
Sierra Club Connecticut