February 28, 2020

Dear Senator Flexer, Representative Fox, and distinguished members of the GAE Committee,

Thank you for taking the time to read my testimony today in strong support of SB 233, AAC Elections, particularly automatic voter registration and the expansion of voting rights to parolees. My name is Sarah Ganong and I’m testifying as the political director of CT Working Families.

CT Working Families fights for an economy that works for everyone and a democracy where every voice matters. We strive to be the political home of the multi-racial working class and run strategic legislative and electoral campaigns to win material gains for our communities. In the last few years, Working Families has been an instrumental player in the passage of paid family and medical leave, raising the minimum wage, and the TRUST Act (which limits cooperation between local law enforcement and ICE). Our coalition of community organizations, labor, social movements, and grassroots activists brings together workers and the left, whether white, Black, or brown, to fight for a Connecticut that works for everyone.

We know that the strength of our democracy depends on broad participation. Restoring voting rights to parolees and easing registration restrictions will both benefit the state of Connecticut and our residents. In many ways, Connecticut has been in the vanguard of expanding voting rights and ensuring that all residents can exercise the right to vote. We can continue this trend with SB 233 by modernizing our voting systems and expanding the right to vote to further Connecticut residents. In recent Connecticut elections, we’ve seen long wait times (especially in cities and at institutes of higher education) for same-day registration and overburdened poll workers.

Parolee voting would restore the right to vote upon release from incarceration or assignment to a halfway house. Under current state law, individuals convicted of felonies may not vote until their release from confinement and discharge from parole. Connecticut stands alone among our neighboring New England states in denying the right to vote to parolees. Reintegrating individuals who have served their time and been released from incarceration is complex - but reintegration will not be complete until voting rights are restored.

Automatic voter registration would automatically register eligible citizens at the Department of Moto Vehicles (unless they opt out) and would authorize electronic voter registration at other places where eligible citizens interact with government services, such as DDS, Access Health CT & Medicaid, UConn and other state universities, and more. This policy has already been passed in 16 states - Connecticut must be next.
AVR updates voter rolls, ensures the most accurate voter information, reduces duplicate registrations, and easily allows voters to indicate party preference or opt-out of registering to vote if they’re so inclined. And data from other states indicates that the voters reached by AVR are overwhelming younger people, individuals residing in low-income areas, and people of color. Election Day would be simplified by reducing same-day registration lines because voters would be registered ahead of time.

Thank you very much,

Sarah Ganong
Political Director
CT Working Families
sganong@workingfamilies.org