To the Co-Chairs and Members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee:

Testimony SUPPORTING SB233, AA Restoring Electoral Privileges to Felony Convicts Who Are On Parole

Submitted by Joseph Gaylin, Dwight Hall at Yale

To the co-chairs Senator Flexer, Representative Fox and the esteemed members of the GAE committee, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak about why I support immediately eliminating the unfair practice of denying two currently disenfranchised groups in the state of Connecticut – totaling more than 7,000 citizens – their democratic right to vote.

These two groups are:

- People being held in pre-trial detention (i.e. community corrections centers: Whalley Ave., North Ave., The Meadows) who have not been convicted, and not currently serving a sentence but are being held as they await judgement. This group has not technically lost their right to vote in the State of Connecticut and places such as CA, AL, Cook County IL, DC, Puerto Rico and VT, ME all allow this group access to the ballot through absentee voting and/or other methods. *Approx. 4,000 Citizens

- People who are currently living, working and paying local, state and federal taxes while serving terms of parole. Currently every New England state except Connecticut, along with NJ, NY, HI, IL, IN, MI, MT, ND, OH, OR, PA, UT as well as the District of Columbia allow this group to vote. *Approx. 4,600 Citizens

Over the course of this year, I have had the privilege of working closely with the Full Citizen’s Coalition to Unlock the Vote in their campaign to make our system of voting in Connecticut more effective, more inclusive, and more democratic. In this capacity, I’ve reviewed cutting edge research
on the pro-social effects of voting and the reintegrative benefits that voting rights restoration can have on returning citizens. Restoring voting rights for people returning from prison is, without a doubt, sound policy.

But, at the end of the day, cost savings, recidivism reduction, and the litany of policy justifications for voting rights restoration do not begin to address the real injustice that is renewed each and every year that legislative branch fails to restore voting rights for people on parole.

As most of us are aware, people of color are disproportionately represented in the criminal justice system, a trend that is rooted in our country’s legacy of slavery and the hyper-criminalization of communities of color following emancipation. I do not intend to detail the particulars by which the over-criminalization of communities of color is related to voter disenfranchisement; this should be somewhat self-evident.

The restoration of voting rights for people on parole and the failure to facilitate an effective voting process for people on pre-trial detention speaks to a much larger conversation about which communities we value as political constituents in this state. It asks us to confront uncomfortable questions, but, to fail to pass legislation that would likely save the state money, reduce recidivism, and uphold basic democratic standards would both defy common sense and continue a long history of discriminatory disenfranchisement that has no place in the 21st century.

Thank you so much for your work on this piece of legislation.