Testimony of Juan Hernandez, District Director and Vice President 32BJ SEIU

Joint Committee on Government Administration and Elections Committee

February 28, 2020

SB 233 An Act Concerning Elections

Thank you to the Senator Flexer, Representative Fox and members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee for holding today’s hearing. My name is Juan Hernandez and I am the Connecticut State Director of SEIU 32BJ. 32BJ represents over 4,500 men and women in the state of Connecticut and 175,000 members up and down the East Coast. Our members form the backbone of the property industry – building workers, security officers; and office, school, theater, stadium and window cleaners. With our dedicated members, we fight to make life better for all working families in our state and strive for communities where all people are treated with fundamental dignity and respect.

I’m here today on behalf of our members to urge you to pass SB 233 which would strengthen our democracy by facilitating participation and granting eligibility to formerly excluded populations. During the 2016 general election Connecticut was ranked 21st among states as measured by voting-age population, at 58.3%. Over 3,000 parolees were ineligible to participate in that election. At a national level the United States lags most developed countries in voter turnout. Young people and those with less education are less likely to vote. That the percentage of our citizenry participating in the elections in which we choose our governments is so low is clearly problematic; it makes our government less representative and diminishes its legitimacy. SB 233 would go a long way to addressing these problems.

SB 233 would create automatic/electronic voter registration and simplify and streamline voter registration facilitating voter participation by all. Several states have already expanded automatic voter registration beyond the DMV such as Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Rhode Island. SB 233 would also restore the right to vote upon release from incarceration, which is already the case in states like Maryland, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Rhode Island. Allowing parolees to vote would assist their reintegration into society. However, we are concerned that the expansion of voter registration may cause some non-eligible persons to inadvertently register, particularly due to language difficulties. Therefore, we ask that the bill be amended so that the presumption be that such persons acted through no fault of their own and that they be penalized only if they knowingly and willfully register or attempt to vote knowing they are ineligible.

Thank you to the Joint Committee on Government Administration and Elections Committee for the opportunity to testify. We ask that you stand with our state’s families by passing SB 233.

ii Id.

iii Drew Desilver, *U.S. trails most developed countries in voter turnout*, PEW RESEARCH CENTER (May 21, 2018), [https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/05/21/u-s-voter-turnout-trails-most-developed-countries/](https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/05/21/u-s-voter-turnout-trails-most-developed-countries/)


vii Policy Differences of Automatic Voter Registration, BRENNAN CENTER FOR JUSTICE (Jan. 17, 2020), [https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/policy-differences-automatic-voter-registration](https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/policy-differences-automatic-voter-registration) (multiple states have taken this approach: see, e.g., Cal Elec Code § 2268, 2269.)