Chairperson Flexer, Chairperson Fox, and other esteemed members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee, thank you for regarding this testimony. My name is Melissa Keilty and I am from Bethlehem. I am a current Master of Social Work student studying policy practice at the University of Connecticut. I write to express my support of the entirety of SB 233, An Act Concerning Elections. However, the emphasis of my testimony will be focused on the provision of SB 233 which restores the voting rights of those on parole or special parole.

Although Connecticut restored the voting rights to persons on probation in 2002, those on parole within the community were left without the ability to represent themselves through their vote. Except for especially egregious circumstances, every individual in a democratic society should be able to retain their participation in the electoral process.

The dramatic and disheartening growth of the national prison population in the last forty years has increased the breadth of disenfranchisement. This is the revocation of suffrage for a group of people through practices and policies. The ability to vote is an ability to reshape the socio-historical contexts in which individuals live. Rehabilitating previously criminal behavior cannot be sustained by maintaining current systemic obstacles. Policies from this legislature must reflect the dignity of a person in the form of restoring voting access.

The act of voting empowers people to negotiate, improve life for others, and encourages civic participation. Allowing people on parole the right to vote improves their health and social outcomes. It is imperative for Connecticut’s public officials to restore legitimacy and integrity to the democratic process by increasing access to the polls.

The passage of SB 233 will be a steppingstone towards achieving a more equitable society. I urge the Government Administration and Elections Committee to vote favorably upon SB 233.