Esteemed Senator Flexer, Representative Fox, and members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee:

I write as a Hartford City Councilman to express my strong support for SB 233, An Act Concerning Elections. Traditionally disenfranchised and overcriminalized communities like Hartford desperately need measures that will make political participation more accessible to more people. Automatic voter registration and parolee voting will do just that.

Practically every election cycle, we lament low voter turnout in Connecticut’s cities. But what I find, when I talk to my constituents in Hartford, is that low voter participation is as much a product of systemic barriers as lack of will. In my city, people are eager to see local and state government do more and respond better to their needs. But getting registered can be a bigger obstacle than it may seem. Housing instability, fluctuating work schedules, the ever-present scramble for childcare, and the other daily demands of poverty keep many Hartford residents from finding the time to gain access to the franchise. And for residents returning from incarceration, who overwhelmingly live in Connecticut’s cities, the prohibition on voting while on parole is an even more implacable obstacle.

There is no reason for this. Voting is one of our most cherished and fundamental rights, and it should be the principle aim of government to make it easy for as many people as possible. Automatic registration would be a huge step toward accomplishing this goal. Allowing all of our residents to vote, even if they are on parole, would be another. The greatest virtue of participatory democracy is that it makes room for a broad array of views on the issues that affect us most, including policing, criminal law, and sentencing. Our reentering residents, who have already paid for their crimes, have invaluable insights on these matters. We should welcome their participation in electing the leaders who will shape punishment, incarceration, and rehabilitation for generations to come.

Thank you,
Hartford Councilman Josh Michtom