Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 233 “An Act Concerning Elections”
Submitted by the Rev. Josh Pawelek to
The Government Administration and Elections Committee

Members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee, chairs Flexer and Fox, Vice Chairs Haskell and Winkler, my name is Josh Pawelek. I am the minister at the Unitarian Universalist Society: East in Manchester and a resident of Glastonbury. I’m submitting this testimony in support of SB 233, An Act Concerning Elections.

Connecticut has a long tradition of expanding voting rights and ensuring that all citizens have every opportunity to exercise their right to vote. Yet, there are problems with our elections: long wait times for same-day registration, overburdened poll workers, and archaic systems. Automatic Voter Registration (AVR), which has become law in 16 states, often with bipartisan majorities, would address many of the challenges our elections currently face. It needs to be passed in Connecticut.

With AVR, when an eligible voter does business with a state agency, the AVR system simply verifies their eligibility and registers them to vote automatically. Eligible voters can indicate a party preference or opt-out of registration. If a voter does not choose to opt out, they are securely added to the rolls. This common-sense, bipartisan reform helps capture the full potential of our democracy, streamline elections, and save money in the long-term.

AVR would also:
- automatically update voter rolls
- ensure the most accurate voter information
- reduce duplicate registrations
- collect up-to-date information securely and transfer it to the Secretary of the State’s Office and the local registrar of voters
- restore voting rights to people after release from prison
- Increase registration of young, low-income, and diverse voters

While Connecticut has led the country on voter access, there are still voters that we are not reaching. As we’ve seen in other states, those voters are overwhelming younger people, individuals in low-income areas, and people of color. AVR has dramatically increased voter registration rates for these groups in the states where it is fully implemented.

In an era where some states are attempting to roll back access to voting, Connecticut can be a leader in expanding that access. AVR is the way to greater participation in our elections. It’s right for Connecticut. And it’s right for democracy. Please support SB 233.

Respectfully Submitted,
Rev. Josh Pawelek