In Support of Raised S.B. 233, An Act Concerning Elections

Chairperson Flexer, Chairperson Fox, and members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee:

PoliticaCT urges you to support Raised Bill No. 233, An Act Concerning Elections.

PoliticaCT is a 2000+ membership-based statewide organization whose mission is to build a more progressive Connecticut.

SB 233 has several important provisions worthy of your support, but today we focus our support on Section 3, which would amend Section 9-46a of the General Statutes and restore the electoral rights of people who have been released from confinement by the state or federal authority, but who remain on parole or are in the process of paying outstanding fines relating to their conviction.

Currently there are 4,642 formerly incarcerated people who have no right to vote. In addition, there is a smaller number of people who are on parole from a federal facility and are also denied their voting rights in Connecticut.

As an organization that believes fair representation matters to a well functioning democracy, PoliticaCT supports efforts to restore voting rights to people who have completed their sentence of confinement and have returned to life in the community.

Connecticut’s current law prohibiting persons on parole from voting is a remaining piece of broader bans that prevented ex-felons from voting for their entire lifetimes. These policies have a well-documented history of targeting people of color and have disproportionately disenfranchised black and brown people. Nationwide, there are approximately 6.2 million citizens with felony convictions who are barred from voting. More than two million African-Americans (almost 8 percent of black adults) are

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prevented from voting because of felony convictions, compared to just under 2 percent of non-African-American citizens. This current policy has the direct effect of significantly reducing the political power of communities of color by barring parolees, who are disproportionately black and brown, their right to vote.

The right to vote is fundamental to our nation’s democracy and should be guaranteed to every citizen. The barriers people with a criminal record face returning home and rebuilding their lives have been the subject of recent efforts in Connecticut to better understand those barriers. The concept of a second chance society requires that we begin to dismantle obstacles to successful integration, remove barriers to full participation in our society and unlock opportunities for returning neighbors to live up to their highest potential. Permitting ex-felons to vote is an important step toward reintegrating people who have served their time.

For each of these reasons, we respectfully request your support of the fundamental citizenship rights, including the voting rights, of ex-offenders and support this bill.