Testimony to the Government Administration and Elections Committee

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Common Cause in Connecticut

S.B. 233 AN ACT CONCERNING ELECTIONS
S.B. 237 AN ACT CONCERNING CONFLICTS OF INTEREST DUE TO AN EMPLOYER OTHER THAN THE STATE UNDER THE STATE CODE OF ETHICS
H.B. 5283 AN ACT CONCERNING MUNICIPAL ETHICS
S.J. 15 RESOLUTION PROPOSING AN AMENDMENT TO THE STATE CONSTITUTION TO PERMIT EARLY VOTING

Senator Flexer, Representative Fox and distinguished members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee, my name is Cheri Quickmire. I am the Executive Director of Common Cause in Connecticut. Common Cause is a nonpartisan, non-profit citizens’ lobby that has worked to improve the way Connecticut’s government operates since 1971. We have 1.1 million members nationwide and more than 12,000 members and activists in Connecticut. Common Cause in Connecticut has a long history of working to increase transparency in government and advocating for the removal of the corrosive influence of special interest money in government and politics and election reform.

I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify before the GAE committee on this important bill. This bill will have a direct impact on improving the voter experience for Connecticut electors through a variety of improvements to our already robust election law.

First, S.B. 233 AAC Elections addresses a common-sense next approach in improving the voter registration process: Automatic Voter Registration (AVR). Connecticut already provides an enhanced registration process as compared to other states across the country through Election Day Registration for general elections (2013),
Online Voter Registration (2014) and Electronic Voter Registration at the Secretary of the State’s website and the Department of Motor Vehicles. We can be proud that the SOTS and the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) have engaged in a MOU to provide registration at the DMV. **It is time to codify that important agreement in statute.**

Automatic Voter Registration (AVR) is the next logical step in enhancing the voter registration process for Connecticut electors. With this system, eligible voters are automatically registered to vote, unless the individual chooses to opt-out of the registration process. During transactions with state agencies, including the Department of Motor Vehicles, the Department of Social Services or another state agency, the individual is already supplying a variety of data — name, age, address and citizenship status. Under an AVR system, residents are able to both do their state business and **be automatically registered to vote** through a single transaction with the agency.

AVR is more efficient, will expand access to voting, and save critical dollars in the process. This new model offers the most up-to-date voter information and delivers the most accurate voter rolls to cities and towns. Eliminating duplicate registrations significantly reduces the workload for localities that could be susceptible to confusion on election day.

Moving away from a paper-based, manual registration also dramatically reduces the staff time needed to do laborious, manual data entry, so registrars and poll workers can instead maximize their time ensuring elections are run efficiently and smoothly and culminating in cost-savings, as well.

**The move toward automatic voter registration is a common sense, bipartisan reform.** Election modernization and ensuring our elections are safe and accessible is not a partisan issue. Republicans and Democrats have supported automatic voter registration in states across the country.

**Automatic voter registration is bringing new people into the process and helping create a strong 21st century democracy where everyone can participate.** Automatic voter registration laws have been proven to work and been received with bipartisan support. In Oregon, the state’s groundbreaking "Motor Voter" law has helped [register](#) over 220,000 new voters between January and August 2016. Oregon’s law is registering 735 new voters a day, and is [tripling](#) registration rates before the law was enacted. The facts are in: automatic voter registration works, brings new voters into the process, and improves democracy.

Simply put, modernizing our election system is a common-sense reform that saves taxpayer money and helps increase democratic participation. We urge you to vote yes on automatic voter registration.
In support of:

**S.J. 15 RESOLUTION PROPOSING AN AMENDMENT TO THE STATE CONSTITUTION TO PERMIT EARLY VOTING**

This is an important reform that will bring Connecticut in line with a majority of other states. Allowing eligible citizens to vote before Election Day is common sense. Working American parents and students will get a chance to cast their ballot when it’s convenient. No one should have to choose between their job and casting their vote. Voters who are seniors or disabled and need to arrange for assistance getting to the polls will have the opportunity to do so.

Opportunities to vote early mean that our elections will be more representative of what the people want. We need to modernize voting for the way we live now, and that includes expanding voting hours to weekends and evenings, so more Americans have the opportunity to participate in our democracy.

Early voting gives responsible Americans across the state will the ability to have their voices heard, even if they can’t make it to the polls on Election Day.

In support of:

**H.B. 5283 AN ACT CONCERNING MUNICIPAL ETHICS**

**S.B. 237 AN ACT CONCERNING CONFLICTS OF INTEREST DUE TO AN EMPLOYER OTHER THAN THE STATE UNDER THE STATE CODE OF ETHICS**

**H.B.5283 AAC Municipal Ethics** emerges from a compromise reached between the Office of State Ethics, Connecticut Conference of Municipalities and Connecticut Council of Small Towns. We have worked with individual municipalities to craft and review their municipal ethics codes for many years and recognize that there are good intentions around the state to provide guidelines to elected municipal leaders and employees. This is an important opportunity for the state to support and unify these efforts. We strongly support this bill.

**S.B. 237 AAC Conflicts of Interest Due To An Employer Than The State Under The State Code of Ethics** This bill makes important revisions to the Code of Ethics for Public Officials concerning conflicts of interest involving a public official’s or state employee’s outside employer and the employer of such official’s or employee’s spouse. We strongly support this bill.