Testimony in Support of S.B. 233: AN ACT CONCERNING ELECTIONS
Submitted by Morgan Reiss, MSW student and intern for Secretary of the State Denise Merrill
February 28, 2020

Good afternoon, Senator Flexor, Representative Fox, and the distinguished members of the
Government Administration and Elections Committee. Thank you for taking the time to hear my
testimony in support of S.B. 233: AN ACT CONCERNING ELECTIONS. My name is Morgan
Reiss and I am a Master of Social Work student at the University of Connecticut School of
Social Work, an intern with the Office of the Secretary of the State, and I am eligible to vote.

The fact that I am eligible to vote is something I and many of us in the room have never had to
question. When I turned 18, I signed my name on a paper form and mailed it to my town
registrar. Since that point I have enjoyed my electoral privileges freely, even re-registering to
vote online when I moved to Manchester.

When you are convicted of a felony, your political future becomes much less certain. Currently,
in Connecticut, you are permitted to vote if you are on probation, awaiting trial, or if you have
completed your sentence and paid all related fines. You are not permitted to vote if you are
incarcerated, on parole, and/or have not paid all related fines. Confusion around rights leads to
people abstaining from voting out of fear of doing something wrong. Even when formerly
incarcerated people legally can vote, the fear and confusion of past restrictions keep them from
registering and/or getting to the polls.\(^1\) Our judicial system is confusing and punitive enough.
Let’s not continue to have our electoral system be the same.

Beyond confusion around rights, restriction of voting rights for people with a felony conviction
disproportionately impacts Black and brown people. In 2014, there were 9.4 Black people
incarcerated to every 1 white person in Connecticut, and in 2016, 2.66% of the African American
population was disenfranchised compared to 0.61% of the general Connecticut population.\(^2\)
Historically, restricting voting rights through the guise of “criminal justice” was used as a tool to
silence minoritized voices from the political arena\(^3\), and it still functions in the same capacity
today. Restricting access to the polls on the basis of a criminal conviction delivered by a biased
system unduly prevents Black and brown people from full civic participation.

Connecticut is also the last state in the Northeast to still restrict people with a felony conviction
from voting, and one of only three to make a distinction between rights for people on parole and
people on probation. S.B. 233 will align our state with our own existing policies around voting
and bring us up to speed with our eight closest neighbors.

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I urge you to support our democracy by supporting S.B. 233. Thank you again for your time.