SB. 233 – An Act Concerning Elections, Session year 2020

Public Hearing is Friday, February 27

Time and room # will be announced Monday

300 Capitol Avenue in Hartford

State Senator Mae Flexer, State Representative Daniel Fox, ranking members Rob Sampson and Mike France, as well as distinguished members of the Government Administrations and Elections Committee.

My name is Cynthia Samokar and I am a Graduate Social Work student at UCONN. I come before you today to speak on my support of SB. 233 which conveys a message on the voting rights of those with a felony, as well as other populations. I believe that having electoral privileges restored to those with felonies once they have been released from confinement will provide them with an additional sense of belonging to society. There are already so many privileges that have been stripped from this population as punishment.

What can we do to continue to support this population?

- Educate on nonpartisan voter registration
- Continue to advocate for felony disenfranchisement in other states
- Continue to expand voting rights

Once an individual with a felony is released from prison, and can vote after paying their fines, the voting response rates will increase. Since most of the population that is incarcerated are black and brown this will give them a chance to have a voice within their community. My favorite part about this bill states, “the person shall have the right to become an elector” because this is a right that all citizens should have.

The Connecticut Sentencing Commission has a voting rights group that previously assisted the pretrial and misdemeanant population with registration and absentee ballot applications. This was one small step in the right direction. Though this does not affect the felony population it has effects on the overall voting population. Thankfully, the Connecticut Sentencing Commission was able to make a difference with the voting population.

As I write this testimony, I think of the many individuals that can contribute to a major decision within their society once this bill is passed. This population can experience what it is like to have a voice and to have independence. I can only imagine the fathers, mothers and other family members that will be able to join their families with their right to vote. The hugs and tears that will be shed because of one word … freedom.