Testimony of Chadwick Schroeder, UConnPIRG
In Support of SB 233, An Act Concerning Elections

Since the creation of this country the right to vote and participate has always been qualified in some form or another, meant to restrict various groups and people's from participating. However, the universal and unadulterated right to vote and participate in elections is integral to the idea of democracy and freedom.

Today, there are over 6 million American citizens who are restricted from participating in the great democracy on Earth. Today, a little less than half of the American electorate doesn’t participate in our elections. We may blame individuals or groups for their lack of participation but we must look to the root cause of this and not easy justification, like they do not care. For too long we have made human beings in this country fight their entire lives for their right to participate.

Who are we to say who deserves the right to vote and who does not. Disenfranchisement throughout the 20th century was a bipartisan effort, emblematic of the tough on crime policies that have disproportionately put POC in prison. I want all of you to consider the message the state is sending to human beings when we tell them that they are no longer allowed to participate and have a voice.

To take away an individual's voice, is the greatest attack on an individual's humanity. We are not just saying that we do not believe in the fundamental humanity of others, but that their intrinsic value and humanity is up for interpretation as the politics of the day continually change.

We are in the 21st century and it is high time all elected officials stop hiding behind moral panics and fear mongering to justify continued disenfranchisement of those that have served their time and as reason to stall progress on automatically registering every single citizen when this information is readily available. It is the job of every single elected official regardless of partisan affiliation to fight for the right to vote for everyone, you do not and should not get to choose who has the right to vote, that is stacking the electorate and fundamentally undemocratic. When we continue to restrict the right to vote or do not recognize the monumental barriers to democratic participation we will never be able to fix the inequality that is rampant throughout our society.

Today it is February 28th, 2020, if we are not willing to stand up today to continue the fight for every single American citizen's right to participate then we need to reevaluate the legitimacy of our elected officials and their motivations. We need automatic voter registration and we need to allow parolees to vote, when we restrict the young, working class, and POC we are restricting the realization of democracy. That is the first step toward addressing the inequalities that institutions have long put onto different groups.

Today we have an opportunity to turn over a new leaf by giving parolees their right to vote back. Today, by advancing automatic voter registration, you are making the statement that you believe in a democracy that makes sense in the 21st century and that me and every other human being in this state has a voice, that it matters and that our participation in this amazing democracy, regardless of your partisan affiliation, matters.