TESTIMONY OF TOM SWAN

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE CONNECTICUT CITIZEN ACTION GROUP (CCAG)

FEBRUARY 28, 2020

BEFORE THE GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION AND ELECTIONS COMMITTEE

ON

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 other members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee my name is Tom Swan and I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Citizen Action Group. On behalf of our thousands of members statewide I want to thank you for raising various proposals today to strengthen our democracy.

CCAG strongly supports S.B. 233 AN ACT CONCERNING ELECTIONS. The proposal to codify and expand automatic voter registration is a common-sense reform that has seen bipartisan support in other states. It is convenience for our residents, saves towns money and helps to keep our voting rolls clean. It will also help address some of the challenges we have seen around election day registrations. The success of this program at the Department of Motor Vehicles makes it clear that this type program should be expanded to other agencies too.

The sections of the bill designed to lessen the problems we have seen some municipalities have had with election day registrations are common sense reforms that will also protect peoples’ right to vote.

Restoring voting rights for people on parole is the right thing to do and reinforces the recent criminal justice reforms Connecticut has successfully enacted.

This is a very good bill and we urge its rapid passage.

We also support S.J. 15 RESOLUTION PROPOSING AN AMENDMENT TO THE STATE CONSTITUTION TO PERMIT EARLY VOTING. We believe that Connecticut’s Constitution is overly restrictive in terms of voting. The majority of states provide for some form of early voting. Our constitution needs to be amended to allow for our residents to participate fully in our democratic process.

Finally, CCAG supports the two ethics bills you are hearing today. The Ethics Commission engaged a number of stakeholders in developing the proposals included in H.B.5283 AN ACT CONCERNING MUNICIPAL ETHICS. It is said that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of
cure – this proposal provides towns with flexibility and greater guidance to avoid unnecessary scandals.

The other ethics bill S.B. 237 AN ACT CONCERNING CONFLICTS OF INTEREST DUE TO AN EMPLOYER OTHER THAN THE STATE UNDER THE STATE CODE OF ETHICS looks to us like it is designed to close the Katie Wade loophole. Wade was the Insurance Commissioner under Governor Malloy who despite being commonly referred to as a “two-legged ethics violation” was never held accountable for her unethical actions due to the Ethics Commission interpretation of CT law. Wade never should have gotten away with such unethical behavior and we hope you pass this law in a manner that ensures no one in the future would get away with similar behavior.

Thank you for your time today.