WRITTEN TESTIMONY SUPPORTING
SB 233 - AN ACT CONCERNING ELECTIONS

Chairperson Flexer, Chairperson Fox, and members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee, my name is Amber Vlangas and I am writing to you today in support of SB 233 AN ACT CONCERNING ELECTIONS. I live in Sherman, Connecticut and am currently serving as the Advocacy Chairperson for the Center for Rational Justice Studies, Inc (CRJS). CRJS is a grassroots civil rights organization that seeks the fair and constitutional treatment of justice-impacted individuals who are subject to public registration requirements. There is significant overlap between the population we advocate for and the approximately 3,500 people in Connecticut who have been disenfranchised as a result of being on parole.¹

There is no more fundamental aspect of American citizenship than casting a vote, making it imperative that people who are re-entering society after a period of incarceration regain this right. The ideal of universal suffrage requires that each citizen is entitled to cast one vote, and each vote counts the same regardless of who casts it. Voting thus becomes a powerful symbol of political equality. Full citizenship and full equality mean having this right. In order to continue to rectify the troubling racial disparities that have been built into the criminal legal system, Connecticut must take action to give voting power to every single citizen as they pursue a positive path back to their communities.

Connecticut’s felony disenfranchisement law is the most restrictive in New England, as it excludes parolees. In Maine and Vermont, individuals convicted of felonies retain their right to vote, even during their time in prison. In Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and New Hampshire, voting rights are restored automatically when people are released into the community, even under supervision.²

Restoring the dignity of those who have made mistakes and are looking to put their lives back in order, not only follows the principles of basic fairness, it also makes good sense from a public safety standpoint. Research tells us that providing people with stability in the areas of housing, employment, education and community engagement leads to lower recidivism rates.³ This bill is a continued step towards safer, fairer communities where every person has the opportunity to thrive.

Again, the Center for Rational Justice Studies enthusiastically supports this bill and we urge the members of the Government, Elections, and Administration Committee to do the same.