Testimony on SB 233: An Act Concerning Elections
February 28, 2020
Committee on Government Administration and Elections
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The Connecticut Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers, representing over 2,400 members, supports Bill 233. This bill has several provisions that encourages voting and eases access to doing so. We support the entire bill however focus this testimony on voting rights of parolees.

The right to vote should only be taken away for the most egregious of circumstances. Voting is what makes this state, and nation, a democratic society. It is imperative that Connecticut takes all necessary steps to assure that the maximum number of our residents have the right to exercise their right of franchise to vote. An individual who having committed a felony is now on parole should be given every opportunity to be reinstated as a full participant in our society. We should be encouraging civic engagement as one means of re-involving parolees into their community. If we expect those on parole to be “good citizens” we need to treat them as such, and that means extending to them the right to vote.

Part of our judicial system is to hold accountable those who have committed a felony. Incarceration is one way in which we do so, and parole is a step down that recognizes that the individual can safely return to the community while finishing their term of conviction. For a parolee who is now returned to the community Bill 223 provides an important step to establishing one’s full rights and recognizes the ongoing rehabilitative purposes of parole.

If we expect those who committed a felony to move forward in a positive manner with their lives, we need to take steps to facilitate such a change. Denying voting rights is an unnecessary, and punitive measure that serves no positive outcomes. Denying voting rights can be psychologically detrimental to the parolee, impedes re-engagement with the community and denies parolees the right to participate in the electoral process that both directly and indirectly impacts on their lives.

It is time CT joins 19 other states, including all the other New England states, in allowing parolees to vote. NASW/CT urges the Government Administration & Elections to favorably report out Bill 223.