Senator Mae Flexer  
Representative Daniel J. Fox  
Co-Chairs

Senator Rob Sampson  
Representative Mike France  
Ranking Members

Government Administration and Elections Committee  
Legislative Office Building, Room 2200  
Hartford, CT 06106

March 10, 2020

Dear Co-Chairs Flexer and Fox and Ranking Members Sampson and France:


I support S.B. 233 because I have seen firsthand the barrier to entry that voter registration constructs against participation in our democratic system. When I was the president of the College Democrats at my undergraduate institution, the main focus of my club was registering and organizing students and community members to vote in the 2016 election. Though we were successful in registering thousands of our classmates and neighbors to vote, I was simply dismayed by how much doubt and confusion people experienced over their registration status and the cumbersome process of registering to vote. That experience confirmed for me how our unnecessarily confusing and inconvenient voter registration system damps election day turnout and diminishes faith in our democratic system.

In particular, I was struck by how many people simply assumed that they were automatically registered to vote and therefore failed to take action until it was too late. Their intuitions weren’t wrong, our voter registration system is. S.B. 233 promises to correct a failure in our elections that places a wholly unnecessary hurdle in the path of thousands of voters in Connecticut. While a voter registration form might seem like a small obstacle, social science tells us that adding any encumbrance, however slight, is likely to deter a desired behavior. By automatically opting voters into registration, experts estimate that voter registration in Connecticut would increase by nearly 250,000 people in the first year alone. Other states that have adopted AVR have achieved voter registration rates as high as 94%.

I also support S.B. 233 because I believe that its restoration of parolee rights is an important aspect of democratic reform and criminal justice reform. I decided to come to law school because I believe in the inherent dignity and value of every person, regardless of their involvement with the criminal justice system. Parolees are members of our communities: they work and worship with us, they are our friends, neighbors, and family members. They are as much a part of us as anyone else. After serving out their sentence, they do not deserve to be set apart or excluded.
from the political community, especially because the decisions that come out of the political community affect them just as much as everyone else, and sometimes more. Furthermore, I believe that extending voting rights to parolees is an important way to help formerly incarcerated people feel welcomed back into society—that they have a stake in our communities, and all of the responsibilities that come along with it. After the alienating and dehumanizing experience of incarceration, embracing parolees back into our political community fully both reaffirms their humanity and may give them more purchase to avoid recidivism, which is bred by the contempt, prejudice, fear, and exclusion that society wrongly aims against them.

Ultimately, I believe that a thriving democracy invites and facilitates the participation of all of its citizens in the decision-making process. Connecticut should strive to do everything it can to make voting convenient and accessible to all of its citizens, and I am encouraged to know that in the past, your committee has been a champion of voting rights with this value in mind. I encourage you to build upon that laudable legacy by passing S.B. 233.

Sincerely,

Emmett Witkovsky-Eldred

Emmett Witkovsky-Eldred
120 Dwight St., Apt. 507
New Haven, CT 06511