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SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): I'd like to convene this public hearing of the Government Administration and Elections Committee. And for the first hour our public hearing is reserved for elected officials and agency heads. And with that, first on our list this morning is our Secretary of State, Denise Merrill.

SECRETARY MERRILL: Good morning, Senator Flexer, Vice Chairs Haskell and Winkler, Ranking Member France, and members of the committee. My name is Denise Merrill. I'm the Secretary of the State of Connecticut. I have submitted written testimony and it addresses a number of bills before you today. But I wanted to speak to you specifically about a few of the proposals that come from my office.

Connecticut has always taken pride in our commitment to removing barriers to eligible voters registering to vote, and registered voters casting their ballots. So, as part of that history, I am proposing a few concepts together in Senate Bill 233; AN ACT CONCERNING ELECTIONS, that I and others have proposed before. So these will be familiar to

you. This proposal will streamline the process of election day registration to make it easier for local election administrators to administer and for voters to use it.

Since election day registration was first used in the 2013 election, more than 60,000 voters have been able to newly register, change their registration to a new address, or fix administrative issues on election day, which was the biggest barrier we had on election day prior to that time. Basically, people would come and think they were on the list, and for whatever reason, administrative error. Sometimes it's their own fault because voters frequently don't realize that they are responsible for tracking their own voter registration. So, this has been able to be -- it's a terrific advantage for us here in Connecticut because it works well, it runs smoothly in the vast majority of towns, because the vast majority of towns appropriately staff their election day registration locations.

Over the past few elections, some towns have understaffed their registration locations and there have been long lines and delays that have made it more difficult for voters to register, and likely turned away some otherwise eligible and enthusiastic voters. So this proposal is designed to prevent those long lines by ensure that towns dedicate the appropriate staffing to this important democratic function without hampering the towns that are already working very well.

So there are a few ideas here that we have proposed to make this better. Towns, first of all, would be required to submit their election day registration plans to my office for approval at least thirty days

in advance of election day so that we can make sure that they are appropriately planning for what, in 2020, will be I believe a very large turnout. Towns would also be able to open a second election day registration location if they choose to do so. This is purely voluntary on the part of the very few towns that have this sort of a problem on election day. A lot of them are college towns. And so this would allow a town to have an extra location to accommodate those voters.

This proposal would also allow potential voters who are in line at 8 o'clock at an election day registration location to be able to vote, just like voters who are in line at 8 o'clock at a traditional polling place. This is a well known rule and law in our state that if you're in line by 8 o'clock, we will allow you to vote, even if it means staying a little later and the line is a bit long at the end of the night. We simply think it should be the same for election day registration voters. A voter's right to vote shouldn't depend on how they cast their ballot or how quickly their local election officials and fellow voters are able to fill out and process registrations.

This bill would also the voting rights of people who are on parole to be automatically restored once they're no longer incarcerated. Currently, people on probation have their rights restored, but not people on parole, creating confusion among both voters and local election officials alike. Eighteen states and the District of Columbia, including all of our New England neighbors, allow voting rights to be restored automatically when people's period of incarceration comes to an end. In addition to removing the confusion, allowing people on parole to

vote reconnects to the civic life of their community once they're physically back in their neighborhoods. If we believe that criminal justice law is meant to rehabilitate, preventing people who are back in their communities from engaging with the government and civic institutions is counterproductive.

And finally, this bill codifies the system of automatic voter registration that's already taking place at the DMV. Since 2016, more than 400,000 new Connecticut voters have used automatic voter registration at the DMV to register. And somewhat more importantly, more than 550,000 voters have made changes to their registration, which makes it much easier for us to keep an up-to-date list. So, it also provides local election officials with better records. People actually type in their own names and so they don't misspell them. They have to write street addresses. And so this has made it much better. We are on record as having one of the cleanest lists in the New England area.

So, full implementation of this system, which depended on bond funding that was released in February of 2018, is being piloted at the DMV now and it's expected to rollout statewide this year. I believe we're piloting this system, which is a full rollout, meaning that we'll have the little -- for lack of a better word, the little Verifones that you'll be able to access the system of online voter registration through a little electronic device. That would be what we've been waiting for to make this fully productive.

The bill would also expand the system used by the DMV to other voter registration agencies under the Motor Voter Law. Codifying, streamlining, and

expanding this process will make it even easier for eligible voters to register and will significantly expand the number of voters who can conveniently vote on election day. These proposals are all voter-centric reforms that will help ensure that every eligible Connecticut citizen who wants to register and vote can do so conveniently.

The second bill I'd like to talk to you about today is Senate Bill 234; AN ACT CONCERNING VOTER PRIVACY. This bill has also been before you in the past. There is no issue that has generated more angry calls to my office than voter information being online. Voters are horrified to find out how much information our office gives out in the voter file, and their horror increases with each corporate data breach that's reported. When I testified in front of you last year, we talked about Equifax, Target and Home Depot. The situation has only gotten worse. According to Risk Based Security, a research firm that's studied the issue, 2019 was the worst year on record for breaches. There were 5,183 breaches that exposed 7.9 billion records. Those breaches included information about 1.2 billion, with a B, unique individuals from Elasticsearch as well as more recognizable names like Facebook, Twitter, Marriott, and even Words with Friends.

The voter file is meant to be a registry of voters. No one who registers to vote imagines that their personal data will be sold by the state to anyone with \$300 dollars. When Connecticut residents register to vote, their only concern should be which candidates to choose, not that their personal information will be compromised. This bill is in response to the concerns of the thousands of voters who have contacted my office, concerned about the

amount of personal information that's given out with our voter file and the use to which that information is being put.

If this proposal were to pass, we would stop giving out the month and day of birth in the publicly available voter file, while leaving the year of birth intact to closely approximate ages. The day and month of birth is a key piece of information for identity theft. As Frank -- I think it's pronounced Abagnale, the subject of *Catch Me If You Can*, if you remember the movie, put it, if you happen to tell me where you were born, your date of birth, I'm ninety-eight percent of the way to stealing your identity.

About half the states have restrictions that prevent the full birth date from being publicly disseminated in the voter file. This bill would also prohibit the commercial use of the voter file, like forty-eight other states do, because our voter file was meant to register voters, not to be a corporate profit center. There is language for this provision in the current version of the bill, but I will work with anyone to come up with a version that works for Connecticut. We have forty-eight other examples to choose from. I have always been and continue to be deeply committed to protecting the public's access to information. This proposal doesn't seek to make changes in the Freedom of Information Statute. It only seeks to add a privacy framework in Title 9.

Nothing in this bill will obstruct either the democratic process, the public's right to know, or a journalist's ability to get the information they need. All the current users of the voter file who use it to facilitate democracy including the press, researchers and businesses that help candidates get

elected will be unaffected by this bill. Connecticut voters are right; they deserve to know that registering to vote will only register them to vote. It should not put their personal information on the internet or result in a sale to large data collection companies.

I am also again proposing House Bill 5282, AN ACT CONCERNING POLLING PLACE CHALLENGERS, that we eliminate the outdated challenger designation from Connecticut's Election Law. This designation, which practically has not been used for years, is a vestige from a long past time, when everyone in town knew everyone else in town and it has no real use in our modern election structure. The challenger designation is not necessary under our current structure. Every person lawfully inside a polling place, including unofficial checkers, appointed by registrars to communicate with local political parties, can challenge someone who's attempting to vote in that polling place. The only restriction is that challenge is not made indiscriminately and that the person issuing the challenge suspects, knows, or reasonably believes that the challenge is valid. So, I would propose eliminating the current challenger statute as being obsolete.

Finally, I'm proposing in House Bill 5280, AN ACT CONCERNING ADMINISTRATIVE CHANGES TO ELECTIONS, to make some necessary changes. Again, they've been proposed before. They include; adjusting state statutes to conform with a federal court ruling in a practice we're already following, changing the timeline for military and overseas ballots in the event of a special congressional election on the advice of the federal Department of Justice, creating a process by which my office can correct

harmless errors in endorsement forms rather than requiring all parties to go through a costly legal process, and directing election cases to be held in Hartford in order to ensure subject matter expertise and the availability of attorneys for the Secretary of the State and the Attorney General, as well as avoiding conflicting judgments in different courts.

I believe all these provisions have been before you in the past. Several of them, as you can tell, just conforms our law to either federal court orders or federal law. I'm happy with that to answer any questions and I hope you'll consider my proposals. Thank you.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Thank you. Thank you for your testimony. Are there questions from members of the committee? Representative France.

REP. FRANCE (42ND): Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Madam Secretary, for being here. On the first bill, the ACT CONCERNING ELECTIONS, one thing that came up in discussion after the last election was, especially with the increase in automatic voter registration, that people that don't know they were registered end up in the EDR line and the polls are closed, and now it's after 8 o'clock, if we'd extend EDR past that time. They're already registered to vote and now they can't vote. So how -- what process would you recommend or change to potentially that process, EDR, that would account for that? Since there were a number of people that, I think, in the last election actually showed up towards the end and they couldn't get to their polling location since they were actually registered to vote and were unaware.

SECRETARY MERRILL: So, if I understand your question, you're talking about people who may have been registered somewhere else, at a different site in town, and aren't showing up at the election day registration site because they were in a long line somewhere else and just --

REP. FRANCE (42ND): No. The --

SECRETARY MERRILL: Is that what you're saying?

REP. FRANCE (42ND): An automatic voter registration. They could intersect with DMV or some other agency. And now we're expanding automatic voter registration. They will actually be registered to vote because they intersected with a state agency. They didn't realize or forgot, and now they think they have to go to the EDR line. And there were a number of people that we heard through discussion that ended up in that place. And so now we're talking about expanding EDR beyond 8 o'clock. If it's 8:01, the polls are closed, and they show at EDR and they were in line before 8 o'clock, now they've, you know, basically been disenfranchised again because they're actually registered to vote and can't go through EDR, even if we expanded it beyond. So, how would you recommend resolving that issue, especially as we're talking about expanding automatic voter registration opportunities?

SECRETARY MERRILL: Well, I would assume if the EDR polling location was open until 8 o'clock and they were in line by 8, that they would be allowed to register and vote, but they would probably bring up the fact that they thought they had registered through the automatic voter registration at the DMV. Is that what you're saying? That they probably registered through the DMV, but now they're in line

to do election day registration because it didn't come through in time? Is that -- I'm not sure I'm quite understanding the situation.

REP. FRANCE (42ND): No, actually it's a situation where somebody went through the automatic voter registration and then forgot. And then they show up because they think they're not registered to vote.

SECRETARY MERRILL: Oh. They're registering again in other words. Right.

REP. FRANCE (42ND): They're trying to register again. Now it's after 8 o'clock, and they're trying to election day register, but they're already registered and there's no process at that point for them to vote because the polls are closed. So how -- now that we're talking about -- it's really talking about that we're expanding automatic voter registrations, so there are gonna be a number of other people that will be in that position, who will intersect with a state agency, register to vote, and then a year later they -- I haven't gone to the registrar or somebody tells them you have to go to the registrar to vote -- to register. Oh, I haven't done that, and forget.

So on election day, they show up in the EDR line, late, and then end up after 8 o'clock. So, I guess the -- there doesn't seem to be a process that would, as they walk in the line, validate whether they really need to be there or not, until they get to the front of the line, as one example. So, I guess, my real question is really dealing with the fact that we're expanding that opportunity, so there will be more people in that position and we are talking about potentially extending EDR beyond 8 o'clock, we have now the potential of this

intersection of people who are registered to vote under automatic voter registration, have forgotten because people tell them well, you have to register with the registrar. Show up at the EDR location after 8 -- are after 8 o'clock now because we're potentially extending it. But you find out they're already registered, they can't vote.

SECRETARY MERRILL: Well, I would say -- I mean, first of all, we're not extending the 8 o'clock deadline. We're just saying that if you're in line by 8 o'clock you should be able to register and vote. And we have had a number of people who didn't -- either didn't realize they were already registered or register again, even through the automatic voter registration, whether it's at the -- whether it's at the registrar's office or at the automatic voter registration site. So, that's not gonna change, I wouldn't say.

But a lot of this is about line management, honestly. And the places we've had the long lines that go past 8 o'clock have been very few, honestly. Most towns, you don't have that problem. It's just where there are some populations that either -- there was problem, actually, in New Haven last -- in 2018, because the absentee ballot situation at Yale wasn't handled appropriately, so a lot of students would've been disenfranchised if they couldn't come and vote through election day registration. But I think the real solution to what you're talking about is line management at the local level.

And that's why we're so intent on having these plans, to make that the towns are planning for these sorts of situations. I'm not sure we can solve every problem, honestly. You know, if someone

registered, they should be allowed to vote somewhere if they're in line by 8 o'clock. And that's why we recommend that the rule be the same for whether you're an election day registration line or whether you're in line at a regular polling place.

REP. FRANCE (42ND): And I appreciate that. But I believe if I understand the law correctly, that if you're already registered to vote, you cannot go through election day registration. You already registered to vote. Is that correct?

SECRETARY MERRILL: Yes. And if you've been registered -- but a lot of people don't realize that they're -- either they've forgotten or they've registered in the wrong place, or they failed to change their address. That happens a lot. And so they'll get to a registration -- they may be registered, but maybe they're at the wrong polling place, for example. Those sorts of things happen all the time. And this actually is a solution to that because they're able to go register and vote anew.

As long as they haven't voted twice, there's no law against being registered in more than one place. As a matter of fact, we believe there's millions of people that are registered in more than one state, because people move and then they don't change their registration appropriately. And we have to be able to accommodate those people because they're still voters. It's just that it's up to them to change their registration, and frequently they don't. So, we have to be able to deal with that and allow them to re-register and vote. As long as they're not voting twice. That's the thing that's a felony and against the law.

REP. FRANCE (42ND): And I appreciate that. And I agree with all of that. I guess I'm dealing with the person who, you know, registers to vote under automatic voter registration and then forgets and shows up in the EDR line, hasn't changed addresses. There's no reason to re-register to vote. My understanding is if they're in line past 8 o'clock at the EDR location, they can't vote because they are not allowed to vote. Re-register under EDR and therefore vote under EDR. They can't go to their regular polling place because that polling place closed at 8 o'clock. And so that I -- that's where we're really expanding that potential by expanding automatic voter registration, where we could have somebody in that scenario.

And I'm trying to understand what you would propose as a resolution to that. Because we're hearing from registrars that that is happening in towns, where people are availing themselves to automatic voter registration, the process, but by the time they get to voting, somebody will tell them, once again, oh, you have to go to the registrar to register. Well, I haven't done that. So they don't think they're registered. So, they show up on election day, but they're already registered to vote and it's late and they can't get to their polling place. And if we're -- once again, we're proposing to keep lines open past 8 o'clock, if they're in line. Once the 8 o'clock rolls over, they can't go to their regular polling place to vote.

So, I'm trying to figure out what -- since we are looking at proposing expanding that potential, what you would propose to allow somebody who may be standing in line for fifteen, twenty minutes, a half an hour, get's past 8 o'clock and then finds out,

oh, I was already registered. I shouldn't even have been in this line, but I didn't know that until I got to the front of it. So, I didn't know if you'd thought about that situation since we've been told that that has happened in past elections under EDR.

SECRETARY MERRILL: Well, it's actually the first I've thought about this particular issue. I would say AVR; the only difference is that people go into the online voter registration system. It's still confirmed at the local level. And so if they haven't received some sort of confirmation, they're still not registered until they're actually confirmed by the local registrar. So, I guess the situation you're proposing would be somebody who had not gotten that confirmation, so, technically, wasn't registered. Or if they received it, they forgot that they received it or whatever. So, again, it goes back to the voter themselves. We do everything we can to allow as many people to vote as possible who are eligible and registered voters. And so, I think I'd err on the side of allowing people to vote as much as we can and re-registering them if necessary. Because I'm not even sure, in that situation, if they don't know they're registered. Is that basically the problem here? And they haven't received that notification back from the registrar. You have to remember, even under automatic voter registration, you're not truly registered until you get that confirmation from the local registrar.

REP. FRANCE (42ND): Right. I'm aware of that. But, as I say, it was something that was raised and especially I've gotten feedback that these things had happened as we have gone into automatic voter registration with the election day registration.

That intersection has caused times where people have been in line and 8 o'clock has passed when they get up to the front of the line for EDR. Or it's two minutes 'til, they find out they're not registered to vote -- or they are -- they are registered to vote, and now they can't -- don't have the time to get to their regular polling place in order to vote. So, I think that we're gonna see more of that. So, I would encourage you, you know, maybe look at that scenario.

As we're expanding this opportunity, I think you're gonna see the intersection, if EDR is beyond 8 o'clock, where people are gonna forget they registered or somebody's gonna tell them you have to go to the registrar to register, and they didn't. They went to DMV or some other state agency that registered them and they forgot that that had happened. So, I think that that -- we're starting to hear reports of that and I think we're just gonna see an expansion of that, so. Appreciate the discussion on that.

Now, going to expanding parolees versus probation situations. My understanding of that situation, parolees are still under the Department of Corrections. They're technically still in a state of incarceration in the sense that they're under the care of the Department of Corrections. Versus probation, they're under a separate agency. So there are really two different statuses. So, I guess I'm confused as to why you say there's confusion in registering to vote and who's eligible to vote, because that seems to be the gist of your testimony. If you could clarify.

SECRETARY MERRILL: Yes. I guess I feel that whoever's in the community, out of incarceration, should regain their right to vote because they're in the community. That's the gist of it. I'm not sure why there was ever a distinction made. You're saying because they're under the tier and protection of the Department of Corrections, but they are not incarcerated anymore. And so I guess that's -- the gist of my argument is that if they're in the community, they ought to be part of that community and we should be encouraging that.

REP. FRANCE (42ND): And I understand. I guess -- you also pointed there was confusion. Does that mean that there some people that were paroled that were registered to vote inadvertently and weren't -- and the registrar wasn't aware or -- where was the confusion that you were describing in your testimony?

SECRETARY MERRILL: No, it's actually -- I think the biggest problem we have is that people who were formerly incarcerated are nervous about re-registering to vote. They think -- they're nervous. They don't want to get in trouble. And so we've had a lot of problems just informing them of their rights. That's been the biggest problem. So, we do have voter registration cards that go with people when they're being released from custody. But, you know, that's probably not the first thing they're thinking about when that's going on. They're looking for a place to live and so forth, and reconnecting with family and that sort of thing. So, we just want to make sure that they understand that they do have the right restored. And that's been the confusion, I think, is among the people themselves who are scared to re-register. So, we

want to make sure that everyone who's being released is at the same status.

REP. FRANCE (42ND): Well, thank you for that clarification. On the automatic voter registration, as we're starting to expand this, you mentioned the letter, the check that registrars send out to validate the address. Is there any report from the registrars back to the Secretary of State's Office on, you know, letters that are returned undeliverable and the voter is then put in inactive status, so that you're aware of, you know, whether there is a percentage and an issue that needs to be resolved and maybe a statutory or regulatory change, or even training at the AVR locations? So, how are you going to get feedback on the efficacy of that process?

SECRETARY MERRILL: I believe the process is the same as it is for any registration, because any registration, whether it comes in through the online system or in person, at the registrar's office, has to be confirmed with a postcard to the address listed. And if it comes back undeliverable, there's a process in statute what the registrar should do with that registration. And I believe it's the same for either -- any way you register.

REP. FRANCE (42ND): I agree with you. I believe they're solely -- all they do is they put them in inactive status.

SECRETARY MERRILL: Right.

REP. FRANCE (42ND): But I guess my response is you're -- you have the oversight of election law. So, I guess the question I would have, we're expanding opportunity to vote, we're changing the

methodology, we're expanding the methodology we have with, particularly, automatic voter registration, how are you getting feedback to understand whether there are issues with that process? For instance, you have an automatic voter registration; all of a sudden you see a spike of registrars that are people in inactive status.

If you're not receiving a report on a monthly or quarterly basis from the registrars to say ten percent of the AVRs we're receiving from this particular agency are being returned as undeliverable, and that would then alert you. So, if you're not receiving that kind of report, how are you maintaining oversight of the voter registration process and to see if there might be an issue with some of the changes we're making and that might direct future changes in the statute?

SECRETARY MERRILL: Well, the voter registration process is all handled at the local level. Our office is advisory. We try to help people follow the laws. We now have a whole certification and training program. But really, we develop policy based on conversations with the registrars. The ROVAC, we're frequently in communication with them about various proposals we have. They make some. We work together that way. But this would be -- we don't keep those sorts of records at the state level. We never have. That would be a real expansion of a state role, honestly. We just have to assume that the local registrars are doing their job and keeping track of how many people are coming back -- you know, how many postcards are coming back unreturned is not something we've ever done.

REP. FRANCE (42ND): No. And I appreciate that. I guess we're changing how we register to vote. We're changing from where it was always done in person and we're now, you know, allowing online, but we're expanding that, pretty dramatically, under the proposal of AVR, the agencies and how we're going to intersect. And I just -- I don't know that if we've ever looked at has there been an issue of, you know, people registering to vote and then going -- potentially, when a card is returned, they're going inactive and not know that.

But also you're not aware that the policy that was implemented may have some flaws in it, unless they're anticipatory, and I think even ROVAC, they're dealing with anecdotal information from their individual registrars, as opposed to a formal report or something on a quarterly basis, even a data dump that you should be able to get out of the software that says here are the number of people what went inactive from AVRs. I'm just curious why there isn't some look at -- when we are changing major policy on how we're registering to vote, to validate that that process is effective and there aren't concerns about how it's being implemented, and the how you have oversight of that in your office to ensure that that's happening appropriately.

I'm not saying the registrars aren't doing their job, because I think they are. They are putting -- doing -- appropriately putting it in inactive status. But if the policy is such that, as I said, ten percent, fifteen percent, a high number relatively, are coming back and ending up in inactive status, maybe there's something we would need to tweak in the AVR process. And it just seems

like you wouldn't have that knowledge to be able to oversight since you're the one that proposes those changes, so.

SECRETARY MERRILL: I have no evidence that anymore are coming back than when people came in in person. The online voter registration system has been a convenience for people more than anything. And you, of course, can go on your iPhone or whatever and register to vote through the online voter registration system as well. I think it's worked very well. I haven't heard any discussion of there being more postcards returned than when people came in in person.

I think we're just in a new world of online now and so -- it's still a local function. It's performed at the local level and I don't know how we would -- you know, we could expand our role and play some sort of role in aggregating all that information. It would be expensive and it would be a burden on the local towns. But I don't think -- I haven't seen any reason to do it. Let's put it that way. Because it's the same process we've always used, which is, you know, when you get a registration in, whether it's online or in person, you send that person a confirmation postcard, and maybe sometimes they come undeliverable. I have no evidence that there are any more of those than there ever have been. But that's all been administered at the local level until now.

REP. FRANCE (42ND): I thank you for that. I guess my point would be you wouldn't know whether there's been an increase because you didn't have the data before. And I think -- what I would think, in just comments with ROVAC and other registrars, it's

really anecdotal because they're not keeping the data either. So, we don't even know whether there is a problem in a local level. And I guess I would assume that there ought to be some ability to the existing software to issue a report that says it. It wouldn't be an overburden.

But then -- as I said, my point is we're talking about expanding the opportunity to register to vote online, where it's not a face to face, and are there issues with that. But you're really gathering no data to understand whether the policy is effective or not. And I guess that's my concern when we're talking about expanding existing opportunities. Do we know they're effective? And really dealing, based on what I'm hearing, anecdotal responses from registrars as opposed to some kind of an objective measure to say, yeah, it's effective, even if it was only for a year or two as we wrap up.

You would then have some insight into whether there are concerns or issues from an objective measure that maybe the policy needs to be tweaked a little bit or maybe there's a training thing. I don't know. I think as we're expanding this automatic voter registration, we ought to be looking at that intersection with the people and to understand, at least at the outset, whether it's fulfilling the obligation as required by statute. Thank you, Madam Chair.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Thank you. Senator Haskell.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Secretary, great to see you. Thank you for your work to make sure every Connecticut citizen has the opportunity to vote. I just have a few very quick questions. You mentioned that the

election day registration cutoff of 8 p.m. has posed a problem in college towns. And as you and I have talked about, I think it's crucial that we engage the next generation and make sure that young people have the opportunity to vote. I wanted to give you an opportunity to expand upon that and exactly which demographics you see being turned away who are in line to vote at 8 p.m., but due to our law are unable to do so.

SECRETARY MERRILL: Yes. Thanks for the question. As some of you know, I have a lot of experience with this, having represented the Town of Mansfield, aka Storrs, aka UConn, for many, many years. And back before any of this online was going on, we always had problems because students tend to show up at the last minute, and there's lots of them. You know, my town of Mansfield is a town of 10,000 people that swells to 25,000 when school is in session. It's wonderful and the students are -- they show up in big numbers in a presidential year. That's why we're particularly concerned about this year, but it's a good concern to have. It's wonderful that they all want to vote.

We're seeing a surge in young voters that we haven't seen since the 1970s. The registration points to the fact that eighteen to twenty-four year olds are now registering in larger numbers than they have in many decades. This is a great thing and we just have to be prepared to accommodate that. And because many of them are in college in November, they have a long-established right to vote where they reside at the time of the election, as does everyone, and so they frequently choose to use that right in college towns. And so, I just think it's a great thing. It's not something to be sorry about.

It's something to celebrate, actually. And so I just want to make sure that these young people, when they're casting their first vote for president, have the opportunity to do it and are not turned away in any way, shape or form. And so I think that's the highest policy goal we can have.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Thank you so much for that answer. It's greatly appreciated. I also wanted to give you an opportunity to respond to concerns about automatic voter registration. I understand that there was a time at which some folks saw their party status change. Is that still an issue that your office is encountering?

SECRETARY MERRILL: Oh, yes. Thanks for asking about that. Yes, we were having a problem. As we developed these new programs, we had a problem because I think the form that people filled out when they were at the DMV was a little confusing. And if you failed to fill out a certain part of it and sign the bottom, you were taken out of a party status and sometimes didn't realize it. And you became an unaffiliated voter and therefore weren't able to vote in primaries. We had several instances of this. This is an example of some of the things that do come to our attention.

And so we have now changed the form and we no longer have that problem. There's a prompt. And this is some of the advantage of having a more automated system such as these little electronic things, because you'll be able to -- it'll stop you at the point at which that might happen and make sure that you realize that you're changing your party affiliation. We have not had a problem since and I understand it's been vastly improved.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): That's really great to hear. Thank you so much. I just have two more questions and I want to follow up on your exchange with my colleague regarding if you're on parole, whether you're still in the custody of the Department of Corrections. So, to your knowledge, those who are on parole, do they have the ability to drive, to go to school, to shop in a local supermarket, to come to this building to testify, any of the other things that come with citizenship?

SECRETARY MERRILL: In general, yes. I believe there are some very narrow categories where all of that may not be true. But they are still in the community, living in the community with very little restriction of their activities, and a full participation is devoutly to be wished for people coming back in if you want restorative justice.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): If they're an individual in our community who was on parole, when they -- on election day it would be clear that they were, unfortunately, subjected to a second-class citizenship, but otherwise you would never know that it was somebody at your job or, you know, sitting in a classroom with you.

SECRETARY MERRILL: Correct.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Okay. Thank you very much. The last question I have is I feel as though often in this committee, there's a dichotomy presented to us between the integrity of our elections and the accessibility of our elections. And I wanted to give you an opportunity to weigh in on how we can make our elections both more accurate, but also more accessible. I view it as a false choice, and I wanted to make sure that this committee had an

opportunity to hear from you about how successful Connecticut has been in expanding the right to vote, but also ensuring every step of the way that we do have an election system that works. And given everything that's happening in the primary system across the country, I think it's really crucial that voters in general understand that Connecticut elections do work quite well. So, do you want to weigh in on that?

SECRETARY MERRILL: Yes. It's a great point. I think all the time that elections always seem to be about balance. You're balancing security versus accuracy versus speed of elections. You saw something happen in Iowa. People are frequently asking me can what happened in Iowa happen here. We have taken a very cautious approach to new technology in Connecticut and yet, we -- yes, we do have expanded opportunities to register and to vote.

And I think Connecticut is well known for having all the best practices in elections. We have paper ballots, for example. We did not go to touch screens and automatic, what they call DRE machines, back when we were just purchasing new equipment after the Help America Vote Act in the election of 2000. So, with that balance came also an opportunity to expand. When we go to something like an online voter registration system, as we were just discussing, of course there are different procedures you need to put in place. But there are plenty of checks and balances to make sure that people are still having an expanded opportunity to register, which is what voters want. They do everything online now.

So, it would seem really anomalous not to be able to register to vote online with our current technology that can check your signature; that can check your driver's license. So, it's always a balance. I think we've struck a very good balance in Connecticut with security and making sure our lists are accurate. We have received an award, if you will, for having the most accurate list in New England, and I think a large part of it is because we do check the lists. We have something called the ERIC system, which is a crosscheck list across state lines. We have all kinds of reports that are given to our local registrars about people who have died both in state and out of state. So, we're doing better and better at making sure our lists are accurate and yet give everyone the opportunity to vote.

I always like to remember, there are only two requirements to being a voter. You have to be eighteen years old and a citizen of this country. And that is a right, not a privilege that we have to vote. So, I'm very proud of the work we've done in Connecticut, both to expand opportunities to vote and register, but also to maintain clarity, accuracy, and access. So, I think we all should be proud of our elections here in Connecticut and I very much hope nothing like Iowa happens here. You can never say never. But we do the best we can to protect our system.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Thank you so much, Madam Secretary. I appreciate your hard work. And thank you, Madam Chair.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Thank you. Senator Sampson.

SENATOR SAMPSON (16TH): Thank you, Madam Chairman. Hello, Madam Secretary. Thank you for being with us today.

SECRETARY MERRILL: Good morning.

SENATOR SAMPSON (16TH): I'm enjoying the conversation and I do have a few questions for you.

SECRETARY MERRILL: Mm-hmm.

SENATOR SAMPSON (16TH): Although, I want to preface my questions by saying that along with everyone else on this committee, I want to see the greatest access to voting possible. But we have a perennial discussion and it almost seem déjà vu that we come back to the same place every time, which is, as we're expanding access to elections, my concern is always integrity. And I just - I'm a little shocked by the conversation this morning about how we are so pleased with ourselves about how smooth and well run our elections are, because I don't think that's an accurate statement.

I think that of all the states in the country, Connecticut is one where the citizens of our state have questions about the integrity of our elections. Not a single major election has happened in the last decade that hasn't come up with news articles the following day with major problems. You say in your testimony election day registration works well and runs smoothly in the vast majority of towns. I don't think that's something to celebrate. It needs to run well in all towns. And we had major problems in the last -- 2018 cycle, I mean, significant problems, that make people wonder about the validity of our elections.

So, we do have to address these things. And each year I put policy before this committee for maintaining the integrity of elections, and I go on with the vast majority of things we do to expand elections at the same time. It's just upsetting to me to see that we are celebrating when we have no reason to celebrate. We do need to fix things. Regarding the bill that you've got before us, we're talking about election day registration. I appreciate that you're trying to come up with solutions to prevent the problems that we have and I want to work with you as much as possible on those. But there's things in the bill that are not very clear to me.

For instance, we're gonna require the registrars to have access to the central voting system, but in section two, you're allowing them an opportunity to set up another location, which I think is okay, except that how are they going to access that central voting system. Is that gonna be done through the internet or through a router or -- what's the mechanism that allows them to do that?

SECRETARY MERRILL: I believe it's a router and I'd have to find one of my IT staff to tell you exactly how it's done. But I'm told it is not difficult. It would not be -- it would not be internet-based as I understand it. Yeah, it's a router. Our system is on what they call a closed-loop system. It's not exactly on the internet. You have to have access and every town has one server or router in one point, usually in town hall. And that's the one that we are busy making sure is secure right now with --

SENATOR SAMPSON (16TH): Gotcha. So, it would be like a Wi-Fi connection, but not on the internet itself and --

SECRETARY MERRILL: I guess so, yeah. Right, right. Exactly. We're very, very conscious about security concerns, this year in particular.

SENATOR SAMPSON (16TH): I appreciate that.

SECRETARY MERRILL: Yep.

SENATOR SAMPSON (16TH): I notice also in section two that you are going to remove the crosscheck process. And I think you eluded in your testimony to saying that it would speed up the process somehow. I'm not sure exactly how it speeds up the process. My understanding is that we'd just simply segregate those ballots. It doesn't hold up anyone in line or anything like that.

SECRETARY MERRILL: If that's a question? I mean --

SENATOR SAMPSON (16TH): I'm just curious. I mean, you're asking to remove the crosscheck in our law. And I think it's a valuable provision and I'm just curious to know what the reason would be.

SECRETARY MERRILL: Yeah. I think the sense is that because the registrar or whoever is registering people, have to stop and try to reach another town if someone says they were previously registered in another town that it would hold things up. Now, I've been talking to registrars who say that they don't handle it that way. So, it probably -- it may be a function of how it's handled at the local level. So, we'll have to talk about that.

SENATOR SAMPSON (16TH): I've talked to a number of registrars and they tell me that it doesn't slow

anything down at all. That they just segregate those --

SECRETARY MERRILL: Right. I've heard that too. So, we'll have to --

SENATOR SAMPSON (16TH): To me -- I mean, can we work on this? Because the crosscheck to me -- look, I own rental property in a number of towns. I have utility bills for a number of towns. I could register to vote. I could be automatically registered to vote under this law in a number of places. And I know it's a felony. But suppose someone actually had the ability to register at five towns, votes in maybe five different congressional districts and, you know, vote for five different state senators and five different state representatives and so forth. Yeah, they could be prosecuted, but those votes still count. Isn't it a concern that we have a mechanism in place to weed that out?

SECRETARY MERRILL: You're saying that they could register using election day registration in five different places because -- of course, that could happen now. I mean, if you were to register in a bunch of different places under different addresses. I mean, it wouldn't have to be EDR.

SENATOR SAMPSON (16TH): Right.

SECRETARY MERRILL: You're saying, though, under EDR. Somebody could come to five different places and register in five different towns and vote in five different towns. Is that what you're suggesting?

SENATOR SAMPSON (16TH): Well, I'm not really talking about EDR in that particular instance.

SECRETARY MERRILL: Oh.

SENATOR SAMPSON (16TH): Because I don't know -- well, I mean, if you think about these things deeply enough, they apply in every case because people that are in the election day registration line are not voters at all until they are -- become electors and they're not subject to the crosscheck presumably, because they are not already registered to vote.

SECRETARY MERRILL: Right.

SENATOR SAMPSON (16TH): Unless they did register in another town.

SECRETARY MERRILL: Right.

SENATOR SAMPSON (16TH): Anyways, it just -- these conversations tend to breed more and more questions about what could happen if there were bad actors. And that's my concern. I guess, though, the one thing that I have the greatest concern about in the entire proposal is the -- allowing people to vote after 8 p.m. I understand the intent of allowing people who are in line before 8 p.m. the opportunity to vote and I can certainly appreciate that. I feel like, you know, they should have that chance. The problem is that it's not so simple. The election is over at 8 p.m. and there are many, many requirements that are put on the process from that point. The registrars, you know, closing.

There's the situation that Representative France brought up, where someone is turned away from election day registration because they're already registered, but then they can't make it back to vote, because we have two different deadlines now. We got the people in line, who get an extra benefit that the people who are registered to vote do not.

And there's requirements for the registrars to collect the data and get it to you. You know -- I mean -- you know -- I don't know what time they finished in New Haven in 2018. I don't even know when that was. I mean, when are polls supposed to close so that we can start having results if people are in line at 8 o'clock, but it takes until midnight before everybody's got a chance to vote? What do we do in a case like that? Shouldn't there be a hard and fast deadline?

SECRETARY MERRILL: Well, that's true now, I mean, for all voters. The rule has been for a very long time that if you're in line by 8 o'clock you're allowed to vote. This is no different. And I guess you could argue, well -- I mean, the problem there is probably planning on the part of the town. But voters should not be disenfranchised just because the town didn't provide the resources to get them through the line in time. So, the basic rule is, if you're a voter and you have a right to vote, if you're in line by 8 o'clock you ought to be allowed to vote.

SENATOR SAMPSON (16TH): Right. I couldn't agree more. And so my focus would not be on expanding opportunities to vote after 8 p.m.

SECRETARY MERRILL: Right.

SENATOR SAMPSON (16TH): What I would be trying to do is come up with the infrastructure and everything necessary to make sure that every voter is accommodated. I'd say, you know, if there's one thing that I think discourages people from voting, including in New Haven, it's lines.

SECRETARY MERRILL: Right. Absolutely.

SENATOR SAMPSON (16TH): I mean, if they could show up 7 o'clock and vote, you know, or show up at 7 o'clock and see that they're gonna end up being there for a couple of hours, they might pass. To me, that's a larger problem than accommodating what happens after 8 o'clock. Let's fix the real problem, which is being able to accommodate voters before 8 o'clock.

SECRETARY MERRILL: I agree. And several of these proposals do exactly that. This is our attempt to come up with solutions to exactly that problem.

SENATOR SAMPSON (16TH): Understood.

SECRETARY MERRILL: And I think it'll make -- actually, several of these things will make it less likely that there will be long lines on election day registration or any other line. And of course the real solution to all of this, as thirty-nine states are already doing, is early voting, because you take the pressure off election day. But that's another conversation.

SENATOR SAMPSON (16TH): Well, I -- there's just a couple other concerns regarding that, just because our existing statutes have other requirements. Like, for instance, I think that the tabulator results have got to be recorded and presented to the secretary of state by midnight.

SECRETARY MERRILL: Yeah.

SENATOR SAMPSON (16TH): And I think that could be problematic if we have another situation like we had in New Haven or Storrs. And I just -- it's not addressed in your bill. That's all.

SECRETARY MERRILL: Right.

SENATOR SAMPSON (16TH): Just talking about automatic voter registration for a minute. I'm certainly not opposed to finding ways to get people registered to vote in a way that's more convenient for them. But I do have a concern about cluttering up the voting roles. You even mentioned this when you were talking with either of my colleagues. The problem is I think that if we're gonna start a process of automatically registering people to vote because they come in contact with various state agencies, isn't there the potential that people can become registered numerous times?

And we also know, even though it's a terrible thing, that many people don't vote at all ever. In fact, there's people in my family I -- I need your vote, you know. I'm not voting. It's a waste of time. It's frustrating. But those people are gonna end up on the voter rolls, even though they have no intention or desire to ever vote. And I could just a situation where, you know, somebody that never votes at all, but they go to motor vehicles, they get signed up on motor voter. And then they go home, maybe they get married, they move to a different town, then they get registered again. And, you know, pretty soon they're on the voting rolls in five towns, five different ways, and they never voted anyway. Doesn't this present a problem, when we're trying to maintain the integrity of the vote to know that we have accurate information about legitimate voters?

SECRETARY MERRILL: No. We have processes by which we clear our lists every year. We do the best we can to have the list be as accurate as possible. People move a lot and they don't always change the registration. And there's nothing wrong with that.

It's just that they can't vote more than once. So, honestly, I mean, it is a challenge to keep lists of any kind these days that are absolutely accurate. It's a moving list all the time.

SENATOR SAMPSON (16TH): So, my --

SECRETARY MERRILL: But it's okay. People have responsibility for their own list, but they run the risk of not being able to vote when they get to the voting booth. And we, of course, hope that everyone votes and getting them registered is at least the first step. At least then maybe they'll feel like voters and then maybe they'll actually end up voting, even if they didn't intend to. Something will come along that will pique their interest, and we hope they come out and vote.

SENATOR SAMPSON (16TH): Well, I share that desire to encourage people to vote and get them involved. But I do not share your opinion that it's no big deal that the voting list is going to have lots and lots of extra names and multiple people registered multiple times in multiple places. I see that as a tremendous problem. I think that if we are concerned about the integrity of elections, we should be trying to refine that list into something that is accurate and meaningful, instead of creating the opportunity for many, many more problems and for fraud. If you're registered in multiple places and people become aware of that, there are bad actors in our world. We need to limit their ability to act badly.

I noticed in, I think it's section four, talking about automatic voter registration, there's a section that says that if somebody who is applying for a driver's license or license renewal or an

identity card, and the motor vehicle person is not aware of whether they're a citizen, such person shall attest to his or her citizenship. What does that mean?

SECRETARY MERRILL: It means that they sign something saying I am a citizen of the country, on penalty of perjury and multiple fines and prosecution.

SENATOR SAMPSON (16TH): Are they warned of those penalties and fines at that time?

SECRETARY MERRILL: Yes.

SENATOR SAMPSON (16TH): Okay. Is there -- forgive me; I've never participated in motor voter. My understanding is that you fill out the registration side on one side of the document and the voter registration on the other side of the document. I mean, is it fine print or is the person who works at motor vehicle is asking them to raise their right hand and swear that they're a citizen? What's going on there exactly?

SECRETARY MERRILL: You are not allowed to continue, is my understanding, because I haven't used it myself either. Although I'm about to, because I'm gonna go get a read ID.

SENATOR SAMPSON (16TH): I need to do that too.

SECRETARY MERRILL: My understanding is you cannot continue if you don't answer that question. It's like when you go to get an airline ticket; you won't be able to go any further if you don't fulfill that requirement.

SENATOR SAMPSON (16TH): Understood. Okay. It seems like a pretty weak requirement as far as I'm

concerned, to verify whether or not someone is a citizen, between you and me.

SECRETARY MERRILL: It's the same way we've always done it.

SENATOR SAMPSON (16TH): Yeah, except we --

SECRETARY MERRILL: The registration card you fill out is the same process when you do it in person.

SENATOR SAMPSON (16TH): I understand that. But the person that does it, in the past, has been a registrar of voters who had, you know, a system and a process set for just that purpose. Not the motor vehicle attendee or somebody that works at DSS, etcetera, in the future when it starts to happen there. Anyway, those are my questions. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Thank you, Senator. Are there further questions from members of the committee? Representative Exum.

REP. EXUM (19TH): Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Madam Secretary. Could you please speak to the security of elections in regards to cyber threats changing the --

SECRETARY MERRILL: Yes. Thanks for asking. It's been a topic of great consideration in the public and nationally, I know. And we have made every effort here in Connecticut to make sure that our voter registry is secure. I always like to remind people that the tabulators on which you vote are not connected to the internet anywhere in the country, actually, but certain not here. And we have all the protections that we've been advised to have; paper

ballots, audits after the fact. We are looking at even more robust audits after elections.

We're looking at what they call risk-limiting audits, and we're already in a pilot program for that. So, in short, we're doing all that we can to make sure. The only thing that is a real cyber risk is really the voter registry itself, which is on a server at the state, and we have had the Department of Homeland Security and the FBI and the CIA and others coming in. We've done a lot of testing on our equipment. They've done what they call cyber cleansing. They're looking at -- they use different products to make sure that there are no incursions into the list.

But it's come to our attention, at least mine. I'm on a national cybersecurity committee with DHS, and the biggest problem right now with security of elections is the propaganda and the false news sites that are everywhere now, and not just from Russia, but from other countries and domestic actors. And that is having a very profound effect, I think, on our elections thus far and will continue. And we're seeing evidence of it all the time. I go to these top secret clearance meetings, where they tell us what they're seeing. We have seen it ourselves.

And so all we can do, I think, as the Secretary of State's Office, we're trying to launch what we call the trusted info site. We want to be the place where people can come for accurate information about the election. For example, we've had sites that tell people to go to the wrong place, on the wrong day, different things about what's on or off their ballot that are not correct. So, we now have a hashtag program, Hashtag Trusted Info, where you can go and

find out where your polling place is and what's going on. So, we'll do the best we can to be the accurate source of information. And I think that is probably the biggest threat to elections this year.

REP. EXUM (19TH): All right.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Thank you. Representative Blumenthal, and then Representative Mastrofrancesco.

REP. BLUMENTHAL (147TH): Thank you, Madam Chair. And thank you for your testimony here today, Madam Secretary.

SECRETARY MERRILL: Thank you.

REP. BLUMENTHAL (147TH): It's good to see you. I wanted to follow up on some of the issues we've been hearing about in relation to voter fraud. And I'm just wondering if you know how many cases of in-person voter fraud were there in the State of Connecticut in the last statewide election?

SECRETARY MERRILL: Well, properly, you'd probably have to ask the Election Enforcement Commission about that, because they are the agency that actually prosecutes reports of voter fraud. It's my understanding that there were none and it's been an infinitesimal amount that's been uncovered nationwide. And somewhere in this packet I have a list of exactly how rare it is to have in-person voter fraud. It's rarer than being struck by lightning. That particular phrase always resonates in my mind. But not to say that we don't attempt and anyone can bring a charge of voter fraud to the Election Enforcement Commission. But they are here today and I'm sure they can speak to that.

REP. BLUMENTHAL (147TH): Thank you. And I was just wondering if you could explain, in your experience and expertise, why in-person voter fraud is so rare?

SECRETARY MERRILL: Well, probably because we have a lot of checks and balances in place. And I think people realize it's a crime. It's a very serious crime punishable by five years in prison, up to five years in prison and that sort of thing. So, I think the concern seems to spring from this idea that there are undocumented, noncitizens voting. And to me, that argument doesn't even make sense in a commonsense sort of way because if I'm an undocumented person, I'm -- the last thing I'm gonna want to do is be uncovered. And it seems to me that it's well known that it's an offense to try to vote if you're not a citizen. So, I don't -- we just don't see it that often.

In fact, the biggest problem is we don't have enough people voting, I mean, much less having people either impersonating someone else, which is very difficult. You'd have to get a false identification of some sort. You'd have to present yourself as someone who wouldn't be voting otherwise. How do you know who that is and so forth? So, I think it's a very difficult crime to pull off, honestly. And that's one of the reasons I think you don't see a lot of it, if any.

REP. BLUMENTHAL (147TH): Thank you. And would you say that it's fair to say that it would be a very ineffective way to try to improperly swing an election?

SECRETARY MERRILL: Well, in particular, I guess if we're talking about a presidential election, it would have to be done on such a massive scale that

it's kind of hard to imagine. And actually, recently, the big concern has been cyber, you know, and whether our election -- the results could be tampered with. And given what I just said about the fact that all our tabulators, and there are literally hundreds of thousands of them across the country, and they are very inaccessible. They're locked up. They cannot be unlocked without two people present. There's all kinds of protections. We actually, in Connecticut, actually test, pre and post-test, even the little cards that are in the machines. So, it's pretty impregnable and so hard to imagine how on any kind of a scale you'd be able to tip, particularly a presidential election.

REP. BLUMENTHAL (147TH): Thank you. And I just want to say I appreciate the measures that we've taken in Connecticut on behalf of your office to ensure those aspects of the election's integrity here in Connecticut. There have been other states that have, I think, gone down the wrong path produced by certain aspects of technology, and I'm glad that we're not doing that ourselves. And I would also ask you, do you view -- if there is significant numbers of people who don't vote because of administrative or other obstacles, do you view that as a threat to the integrity of our elections?

SECRETARY MERRILL: I think there are certain bar -- I think it is a barrier of sorts. If you look at -- one factor is that people move a lot, as I said, and if you're moving from state to state, it's almost impossible to understand why there's so many variations. Every state does this a little bit differently. The requirements are different. The systems are different. And that is a problem.

No one is suggesting that there be some sort of national form of voting, because this is a jealously-held right of states to administer elections, and in most states, including ours, it's very locally administered, which makes it hard to maintain standards, but on the other hand decentralization is actually a gift, in a way, because you have so many jurisdictions.

But it is -- it is confusing for people, especially today, and younger people, in particular, aren't used to doing anything where you have to go in person to a town hall. People live and work in different towns. So, we're all busy trying to adjust to certain things that are changing in our society. And elections have been a little bit slow to change and sometimes I think that's a good thing, because you could -- we can take out time. We don't have room for slippage. You know, it isn't like a bank. I used to talk about, you know, well, you can go to an ATM and get money out of a machine and you can do it all. But a bank knows who you are and you know who the bank is. And so, we don't -- it's not the same situation with elections.

So, I think, you know, taking a cautious approach, particularly to new technology, has been a good thing. But it is confusing for people, all these different rules in different states, in different jurisdictions. And so, I think it behooves us to make it -- as easy as possible to navigate all this, because they have a right to vote. And that -- I keep coming back to that; that this is not just something we're kind of allowing people to do. They should -- it should be as easy as possible and as pleasurable as possible because this is something we want everybody doing.

REP. BLUMENTHAL (147TH): Thank you. Transitioning in subject matter a little bit. You testified today, I believe, also on our proposed constitutional amendments to permit early voting, and I was just wondering if in your conversations with secretaries of other states you've heard of any increased problems with regard to election integrity in states that have adopted early voting?

SECRETARY MERRILL: Oh, absolutely not. In fact, most states that have early voting consider it a failsafe because you don't have the pressures on that one day. So particularly now, with all the concerns about cybersecurity, if you have, let's say, five days of early voting and it's all over the place. Texas, I think they have thirty days of early voting. Some states are voting right now. You have time to check out the lists. You can check out who actually voted, what the turnout was, and make sure that everything's being done appropriately.

So, most of the people I talk to, they can't imagine it any other way anymore. And of course you have states like Oregon, Colorado now, Michigan -- I think about six states now where they do all -- pretty much all mail-in voting. So, if you voted in the last election, they mail you your ballot, you fill it out and you mail it back. It's kind of like everybody votes absentee, basically. And they have the highest voter turnout in the country, and they like it very much. And I haven't heard of anyone thinking it's a problem.

REP. BLUMENTHAL (147TH): Thank you very much, Madam Secretary. Thank you, Madam Chair.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Thank you, Representative. Are there other questions for members of the committee? Representative Winkler.

REP. WINKLER (56TH): And so I heard you say that the decentralized system was in some ways a blessing. It's hard for me to picture that given that it seems like every time anything goes wrong, you get blamed. So, how --

SECRETARY MERRILL: I've noticed. (Laughter)

REP. WINKLER (56TH): So you actually have very little control on the operations at the local level.

SECRETARY MERRILL: That's right. I don't have authority. Local officials are generally elected by their local town, and so -- but we have lots of checks and balances at the local level. For example, as you know, we have two registrars, one from each of the major parties. Town clerks can be either elected or appointed, but they play a role as well. So, you have decentralization even at the local level in terms of job duties. So, yes. And I do not have authority. I have advisory. But we certainly can recommend different -- you know, if something goes wrong, we tend to try to step in and help out and make sure everything is following the law, and we can refer things to the Election Enforcement Commission, which is the ultimate authority.

REP. WINKLER (56TH): So you're not the engineer, but when the train jumps the track, you're going -- I will just say that, number one, it's a tribute to our town officials for how well elections run in this state. And besides your other sterling qualities and your organizational skills, it's a

tribute to you that you tolerate the situation as well as you do. Thank you, Madam Chair.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Thank you, Representative. Representative Mastrofrancesco.

REP. MASTROFRANCESCO (80TH): Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Madam Secretary, for being here. It's nice to see you.

SECRETARY MERRILL: Nice to see you.

REP. MASTROFRANCESCO (80TH): Just a couple of quick questions. But I just want to make a comment. It was interesting listening to the discussion on in-person voter fraud. And I know you work hard and you want to -- as we all do; we want everybody to vote and we want it to be a very honest system. But I think in-person voter fraud is the easiest thing to achieve today. And you can walk into any place. You don't need a photo ID. You know that maybe your -- somebody -- a relative is out of town or maybe sick and you know they're not gonna vote. All you need is, what, a name and address, and you can walk in there and pretty much say you're anybody to vote. I think it's very simple to do today.

And I'm just wondering why - I mean, I really -- voting is really important and it's an honor to vote, and the integrity must be preserved. And I'm wondering why we don't mandate that people have a photo ID to vote?

SECRETARY MERRILL: Connecticut was one of the first states to have an ID requirement, actually. You cannot just walk in with no identification. You are asked for identification. It's just that ours is fairly flexible, you can present different things as identification. And so, it's worked very well. I

think what we need right now is faith in the integrity of the elections. And there's no evidence that there's been a problem with our ID law. I think it's worked very well. And you have to remember, people register and they present information when they register to vote. So when they come in to vote, all they're doing is confirming that they are that person on the list.

REP. MASTROFRANCESCO (80TH): Right. But there's no photo ID, so how do you confirm it's that person on the list? There's no photo to confirm who you are.

SECRETARY MERRILL: Well, I would ask --

REP. MASTROFRANCESCO (80TH): Based on -- I'm just curious.

SECRETARY MERRILL: -- if you think that photo is the only way you can identify someone, and that hasn't been the case. And there are all different kinds of identification laws across the country. Like I say, ours has worked very well. People are asked for their driver's license, but they don't have to have a driver's license in order to vote, so they're able to present other things. Sometimes they have photos, sometimes they don't. You're expected to have two identifiers on whatever you produce. It can either be your name and address, your name and a signature. I can be your name and a picture. So, it's -- what I'm saying is that we are -- we ask people to make sure they're the person on the list. It's just we have the flexibility, that in case you left your wallet at home or whatever, you can still vote.

REP. MASTROFRANCESCO (80TH): Right. And I get it. We do have a lot of flexibility, but it doesn't

curve fraud, because there's no -- anybody can walk in, is what I'm saying, to vote for somebody and say they are somebody else by just bringing some sort of piece of mail, maybe? Something that has a name and address on it. That was to my point. So, I'm wondering, and I understand that you don't believe that there is any of that going on. And I believe that you do believe that the system works well. Aside from that, is -- would a photo ID be something that you would support and maybe recommend to the committee?

SECRETARY MERRILL: I don't think we should be putting up barriers to people voting, and I think that is more of a barrier. I think -- there's no evidence that the system we have of identification isn't working. It's working very well, actually. And --

REP. MASTROFRANCESCO (80TH): Okay. I respect your opinion. I disagree, but I truly respect your opinion. I just had a quick question on Senate Bill 233, about the in-person voting and election day registration. And I think Senator Sampson touched on this a little bit. And based on your testimony, the proposal really is to address the long lines or early voting and voter day registration. So, one part in here says right now our towns are required thirty days in advance to give you a plan on what they -- on a proposal and what they plan on doing for election day to address the lines.

SECRETARY MERRILL: Yes. To make sure that they have the proper number of personnel to accommodate what we will assess to be what we think they need.

REP. MASTROFRANCESCO (80TH): And if a town -- they don't have to have an additional election day registration location. Correct?

SECRETARY MERRILL: No.

REP. MASTROFRANCESCO (80TH): They do not.

SECRETARY MERRILL: No.

REP. MASTROFRANCESCO (80TH): But here, which is a little confusing to me and I'm just concerned that it could cause a problem. If you're in line, say, at town hall, and you want to register to vote, but that town decided not to have election day registration at other locations, it's just available in town hall, and then they're still able to vote. How do they get to the polling place after that?

SECRETARY MERRILL: They don't need to go to the polling place. They vote right there at town hall.

REP. MASTROFRANCESCO (80TH): So would there -- and I'm concerned that that would cause some confusion about ballots, right, because you have different voting locations, it could be that you're voting for different people in different districts, especially a town, even a municipal election, maybe you're voting by district. It would be a concern. Has there any been thought put into that of how you would prevent confusion with ballots? Because we have seen that happen here even in Connecticut.

SECRETARY MERRILL: We haven't seen that or I haven't heard about it with election day registration. They would have the ballots available for whoever lived in that town, for that section of town, and that would go by whatever address they're registering at.

REP. MASTROFRANCESCO (80TH): So, would the town have to have a -- if a town has four or five different polling places, maybe there are four or five different districts within their town, they're voting for different people, would they have to have that set up in their town?

SECRETARY MERRILL: Yes. Mm-hmm. They would have to have --

REP. MASTROFRANCESCO (80TH): In their town hall when they're registering.

SECRETARY MERRILL: They'd have to have the appropriate ballots. I think that how it works.

REP. MASTROFRANCESCO (80TH): Right. I was confused that there could be --

SECRETARY MERRILL: Yeah. That's why it happens now. Yeah.

REP. MASTROFRANCESCO (80TH): So they would have to just give them ballot that correlates with the district that they're in.

SECRETARY MERRILL: Yes, yes. That's how it works.

REP. MASTROFRANCESCO (80TH): And I was just concerned because we've had problems, obviously, in the past. I think I've seen maybe last year or the year before, where people were given wrong ballots.

SECRETARY MERRILL: Not with election day registration. I have -- we haven't heard any of that around this.

REP. MASTROFRANCESCO (80TH): I'm talking during the regular election. So, if this had happened during regular election, it could happen during election day registration, basically is my point.

SECRETARY MERRILL: Oh. Well, there can always be mistakes, I suppose.

REP. MASTROFRANCESCO (80TH): Right. So, I think that was it. I just really wanted clarification on the -- it just seems a little confusing that you're in line, you're registering to vote, and you're gonna be voting for the town that -- is there any expense to the towns for this, if a town did want to have --

SECRETARY MERRILL: Another polling place, you mean?

REP. MASTROFRANCESCO (80TH): Yeah, another location within to register to vote, there would be an expense for the town.

SECRETARY MERRILL: Another location -- yes, the towns bear the expense for all elections.

REP. MASTROFRANCESCO (80TH): Thank you very much, Madam Secretary, appreciate it.

SECRETARY MERRILL: Thank you.

UNKNOWN: Thank you. Representative Perillo.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Mr. Chairman, thanks very much. Good afternoon.

SECRETARY MERRILL: Good afternoon.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Just -- you had started to touch a little bit on the instance of voter fraud and you had some assertions that it's really not a problem and I think that was in your discussion with Senator Sampson. Could you just elaborate on that a little bit more, if you don't mind?

SECRETARY MERRILL: Mm-hmm. Well, as you can -- the person you should actually ask about voter fraud is

probably the Election Enforcement Commission, which is where all allegations of voter fraud go, including those that we choose to bring to their attention. But anyone can bring an allegation of voter fraud, anyone in the polling place who's within the polling place with a reasonable suspicion. There have been an infinitesimal number of allegations of in-person voter fraud, as far as I know. But again, if you wanted the actual number of that being reported, you would talk to the Election Enforcement Commission.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Thank you. What about absentee ballot voter fraud?

SECRETARY MERRILL: Absentee ballot fraud. The same thing. It would be reported to the Election Enforcement Commission if there was an allegation of absentee ballot fraud.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Is there a higher incidence of fraud with absentee ballots than there is in person?

SECRETARY MERRILL: I don't know. It would depend what you meant by fraud. In the case of an absentee ballot, if you're talking about someone filing one who didn't deserve to have one under our statutes, which are extremely strict even by any standard, because you have to have an excuse to get an absentee ballot. For example, you have to be either out of the jurisdiction or unable to get to the polls and so forth. So, I don't really know how many allegations of that sort of thing we've had recently.

You know, there was, of course, a big of incidence of absentee ballot allegations in Bridgeport last

year, which went to court. And as I understand it, the judge did not overturn the primary based on the fact they didn't have enough evidence of the -- of any kind of impropriety with the absentee ballot. That's the only instance I know about, but there could be others.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): I know there was some issue with forged absentee ballots in Stratford. Maybe that was in 2017. Does that ring a bell at all?

SECRETARY MERRILL: No, not really. The Stratford problem, as I understand it, occurred -- the only problem I know about in Stratford was the one where they used one tabulator for two different precincts, and therefore couldn't retrace the results. And I did introduce legislation last year, which didn't get taken up, which I was, frankly, quite shocked to learn that it was okay to use one tabulator for two precincts. Because that's what happened. They couldn't sort out who got the wrong ballots and maybe that's what you're thinking of. So, I would very much love to see everyone take that bill up again, because I still think it's a problem.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): No, I'm familiar with the Stratford situation.

SECRETARY MERRILL: Oh.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): I was one of the four legislators on that fun little committee we had.

SECRETARY MERRILL: Oh. Right.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): It just it bothers me. The issue of absentee ballots bother me, and, you know, you hate to pick on one municipality. But it seems like absentee ballots continue to be a source, you

know, a subject of concern in the city of Bridgeport. What steps could be taken to ensure the integrity of absentee ballots that we're not currently doing? Like, is there anything that -- I mean, you know this better than we do. So, I'm sort of looking to you for guidance for what actions could we take. It seems like we -- there are always allegations and oftentimes issues are found in primaries in Bridgeport, yet it's always asserted that in general elections there are no issues at all. How could that possibly be?

SECRETARY MERRILL: Well, I guess it depends on who's making the allegations and why. I mean, and usually Bridgeport is largely a one-party town, so maybe that's where all the attention get -- you see it. But, like I said, the only time there have been many allegations that have been brought to court -- routinely -- it's a subject of great confusion, honestly. A lot of times people get confused between whether they're getting an application for an absentee ballot or an actual absentee ballot. And so it's very difficult to get to the bottom of what the problem is. We have many protections in place for people. In fact, we have the strictest laws in the country about who gets an absentee ballot.

Most states have what they call no-fault absentee ballots. Anyone can get one that wants to use one. And they do it differently in different states. But here, I can't imagine that we could erect any more legislation that would do more than -- already, you have to check them out. You have to tell the clerks, you know, how -- if you're taking out more than one. Or I think it's more than five, you have to put your name in and they number the absentee

ballots. It's a very, very extensive process to get an absentee ballot.

In fact, it's to the point where I think seniors now are getting concerned and they won't vote if they think they might get in trouble for getting an absentee ballot. So, in some ways, I'm not sure what more could be done to assure people that are bringing these allegations that people are not being harassed or whatever the allegation happens to be.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): And that's fair. I mean, it's -- I think back, you know, like, 2010, which seems like an eternity ago. But, you know, we come back to the city of Bridgeport, and I recall there was a situation that was fairly well publicized, where an individual, you know, as you know, checked out absentee ballot applications, which you can do, and, you know, listed his address, specific address in Bridgeport, and it turned out that that was actually an empty lot. So, we had an individual, you know, and nothing happened to that individual. In fact, he came back, you know, a week later and checked out another two-hundred to his actual address.

So, I -- you have to ask the question. If these are the ones that we're catching, how many are we not? Is that question asked? I just -- my concern is I just don't see a level of concern when it comes to the absentee ballots and we have to say, well, gee, where there's smoke, there's fire.

SECRETARY MERRILL: Well, like I said --

REP. PERILLO (113TH): What steps are we taking?
I'm sorry --

SECRETARY MERRILL: -- it's hard to imagine we could put any more legislation in place besides the many rules there already are. Although, right now, it's still anyone can get an application and send applications to people for absentee ballots. That's apparently fair under our rules. But it's when -- the absentee ballots, themselves, are very controlled when they come in. You know, there's separate envelopes. We're doing all we can to make sure that everything is properly counted. But beyond that, you know, it relies on people making complaints. Many have gone to court. They are what they are.

I don't know what else we could do, frankly, to control it. As a matter of fact, more and more people are using absentee ballots. The town in the state that has the largest number of absentee ballots is actually Greenwich, because more and more people are just saying, oh, maybe I'll be out of town and they -- the public wants to use these absentee ballots. Our laws are very, very strict in terms of who can get an absentee ballot and use it. So, I'm open to suggestion. But from my perspective, I think the question should go to the Election Enforcement Commission as to how many of these things are being filed, how many complaints are actually out there, and what has happened to them.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Thank you.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Thank you. Senator Sampson, for the second time.

SENATOR SAMPSON (16TH): Thank you, Madam Chairman. I just forgot to ask you something before.

SECRETARY MERRILL: Okay.

SENATOR SAMPSON (16TH): But I will -- I just want to thank my colleague, Representative Perillo, for attacking the subject of the integrity of elections again, since there was some dialog in here about how there's no such thing as voter fraud and it's everybody's imagination. I have a list of issues over the last ten years, and it's substantial, and we could talk about it any time. But the idea that there's no voter fraud -- we've had a state representative here convicted of voter fraud. We have had a state rep who had their children voting in elections, even though they lived out of state. And the other things we've already mentioned.

You know, it is a genuine problem, and I'm not saying it's a significant problem or it's worse here than any other state or anything like that. But to ignore that it's a real issue while we're expanding voting, to me, does a disservice and an injustice to the voters in this state. People have to trust our elections. And I want my constituents to not come up to me and go, oh, it's another election, they're gonna find a bag of ballots in Bridgeport. That's no way to have a reputation about our electoral system in this state. And a lot of people have that opinion, and I want us to work together to change it, so.

But the question I wanted to ask you was about the parole versus probation issue. And I just -- for the life of me, I'm trying to understand why the change. I mean, most of the laws that we come up with are based in some sort of principle, and it seems to me the principle that we have is that when you commit an act that you are imprisoned for, you

lose your right to vote. And in Connecticut, I think it's a wonderful thing that once you serve your sentence, your voting privileges are restored. I think that's great. The whole notion of losing your voting rights I think is significant. I think that it is actually - your right to vote is so significant that people would consider that before committing a crime. I do believe that.

So, what is the principle that says that someone who has not yet completed their penalty or their service or their sentence, and they are still serving out their parole, they should be eligible? I'm just curious. What is the principle that says that's okay? Where are we cutting the line?

SECRETARY MERRILL: And again, I cut the line at out in the communities, because they have served their incarcerated sentence, and it depends on your definition of what completing your sentence means. For me, if someone's in the community, they probably should get the right to vote back.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Okay. Yeah, I suppose that's an acceptable answer. I just see the line ought to be after they've completed their entire sentence and, you know, paid fines, etcetera. Once they've done what they're supposed to do to make up for their crime, then they should be eligible. But I guess you and I see it differently. But I appreciate your opinion. Thank you very much, Madam Secretary. And thank you, Madam Chairman.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Thank you, Senator.
Representative Fox.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you, Senator Flexer. And good afternoon, Madam Secretary.

SECRETARY MERRILL: Good afternoon.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you for being here today, for your patience with the committee as we delve into some of these issues before us. But I don't want to take too much of your time or the committee's time. Could you give me a ten-thousand-foot overview of the AVR experience? Walk into the DMV or one of the agencies.

SECRETARY MERRILL: Sure. automatic voter Registration just describes the process by which we can now register people to vote at the DMV as they come in to get a new license or change their address. And all that happens is -- the only difference is you're already at an agency. They are registering you, either registering you as a driver or -- while you're in that process, they ask you, you know, do you realize you're eligible to register to vote. And they can register you. They can put you into our online voter registration system right there on the spot, and they can put all the information into the computer with you standing there. And that way it goes into a system that we use.

Like I say, you can do it on your phone. you can do it on a computer now. You go to a website and you can register to vote if you have a Connecticut driver's license or a permit, because we use that identification to crosscheck your signature with the signatures that are on file with the Department of Motor Vehicles. And that's what makes it possible at the Department of Motor Vehicles. It's a seamless process and it has been used by, I think, it's about 600,000 people have used it to either change their address, change their name, whatever

they need to do to update their records, or to register anew.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you. My understanding, and correct me if I'm wrong, of the process is that if you are -- let's say you go to register to vote and through the AVR system, will the system kick out a notice to your old town and new town in terms of if there's a duplicate registration?

SECRETARY MERRILL: Yes, yes. It does notice -- it does notice, yes, both your old town, where if you had been previously registered, it would send a notice to that town, and it would also send a notice -- it sends a notice to the new town, and you are not actually, strictly speaking, registered to vote until that new town sends you that postcard of confirmation.

REP. FOX (148TH): So it'll maintain the local overview or oversight of elections.

SECRETARY MERRILL: Yes, yes.

REP. FOX (148TH): Okay.

SECRETARY MERRILL: It's still all done at the local level. This just facilitates the process.

REP. FOX (148TH): So the burden would still be on the new municipality to send the card out to you and to ensure that you would then respond to it. So, it just helps with that process.

SECRETARY MERRILL: Yes.

REP. FOX (148TH): This automatic voter registration in a sense, while automatic, there's still some responsibility on the new town as well as on the voter itself to return the card.

SECRETARY MERRILL: Absolutely, yes.

REP. FOX (148TH): Okay.

SECRETARY MERRILL: That's correct.

REP. FOX (148TH): And let's say you're already registered, are you aware -- my understanding is if you're already registered that the system itself will kick back a notice to the person at the DMV right then and there. Is that correct?

SECRETARY MERRILL: That's right.

REP. FOX (148TH): Okay. So there's that level of oversight as well.

SECRETARY MERRILL: That's right. That's right.

REP. FOX (148TH): And to sum up your word, what point is the state ready to implement the system, in your opinion?

SECRETARY MERRILL: We are currently implementing the second phase, which is pretty much -- will complete the system. It's under a pilot program in two sites right now, one in Wethersfield and one in Willimantic, I believe. So, we should be fully implemented by the end of the year.

REP. FOX (148TH): Any feedback from Willimantic or Wethersfield as to how the systems are running?

SECRETARY MERRILL: It seems to be going fine. Yeah, it's going well. We have the new equipment in place there, which is -- it'll be fully automated, in other words. Just like when you go to the supermarket, you sign things, you fill the form out on the little electronic device.

REP. FOX (148TH): Okay.

SECRETARY MERRILL: Yep.

REP. FOX (148TH): If I can also just direct your attention to the EDR section, when you're requesting of towns. Can you walk me through that, in your mind, ideally how that process would work when you ask them to submit information to polling locations, things of that nature?

SECRETARY MERRILL: You mean what's required to use the election day registration?

REP. FOX (148TH): Yes. Or how they are -- you would now ask them to make sure they enough staff, enough other locations. Can you just walk me through the process?

SECRETARY MERRILL: Yeah. Yes. The idea will be we'll have a thirty -- a requirement that towns tell us within thirty days how many poll -- how many staff they will have, how many computers they will have to be able to list people, how many rooms they will have, how much space they'll have and so forth to be able to accommodate the number. And they have to look back at whatever happened last time in an analogous election to make sure that they are accommodating what we see as the potential turnout. We already have a requirement that towns produce what we call an emergency plan, which also addresses some of the concerns that have come up on election day, you know, what kinds of emergencies, whether it's running -- having no power. We've had that happen. Whether you had inaccessible polling places and so forth. So, this just would add to that planning process.

REP. FOX (148TH): And you will submit those required forms to the town, or the format with the information you're looking for?

SECRETARY MERRILL: Yes, yeah.

REP. FOX (148TH): And also, if the town wants an additional polling place, they're required a ninety-day window. Is that correct? You're asking -- I think you have to have ninety days.

SECRETARY MERRILL: Yeah, that's correct.

REP. FOX (148TH): Okay. And do you anticipate receiving many requests of that nature, for the additional?

SECRETARY MERRILL: I would imagine maybe two or three locations perhaps. I'm thinking maybe New Haven, maybe Mansfield, and perhaps maybe one other location. But we don't know yet. But they have time to be able to request that location and we'll help them put it in place. Yeah, I can't imagine it'll be more than a handful of towns, honestly.

REP. FOX (148TH): That'll all be at their option.

SECRETARY MERRILL: Yes, absolutely. Yeah.

REP. FOX (148TH): Okay. Great. Thank you very much. Thank you for your time today.

SECRETARY MERRILL: Okay. Thank you.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): And thank you, Representative. And just a follow up briefly on that conversation. I, just a few weeks ago, was at the Willimantic DMV and so I did go through this experience myself and it is -- it's sort of like the grocery store, you know, where the questions are on the same box where you insert your credit card to

pay. And you go through the steps and it asks you all of the questions about swearing you are who you say you are and all of that. So, it was interesting. And I did it very slowly. And I have to credit the DMV; I was in and out of there in twelve minutes. And if I wasn't so diligent about paying attention to that process, I probably could've gotten out in five. I was very impressed.

But I wanted to -- I appreciate your testimony this morning and the conversation that we've had on so many issues. But the one thing that hasn't been brought up, I don't believe, by any of my colleagues, and I just want to dig a little deeper on, is this issue of voter privacy protection. And I -- your testimony, you talked about this being the biggest thing that your office gets concerns about. And I know I've heard a lot of concerns about this and we've had this conversation in this committee for several years.

And I believe, in public hearings, I've expressed one of my big concerns is that when you have access to someone's birth date, you can very easily pretend to be that person and call their doctor's office and potentially get lots of information, because that is the many electronic medical record systems identify people, is by that birth date. And so, I've always been concerned about that. Again, I think lots of people in our state are alarmed by how much of their information is available.

And every year, we have this conversation and there are people who are concerned about Freedom of Information and they're gonna be testifying later today and they've expressed their concerns in writing already. But you talked about forty other

states having this. Do you have -- and I don't want to ask for too much, but do you have a summary of how other states deal with this and how they carve it out, you know, so that they're balancing the need for public disclosure, but also protecting some basic tenets of privacy?

SECRETARY MERRILL: Yes. And we do -- we have an extensive spreadsheet that we put together a couple of years ago, and I'm happy to make it available to anyone who would like to look at it. And states handle it differently. We are probably one of the most open in terms of the data we release. There's no doubt about it and that's why I'm making this proposal, and specifically around the birth date. Because, as you say, if someone can get your exact birth date and put that together with one other piece of information, basically they can steal your identity because the birth date is the one thing that is immutable about you. You can't change your birth date. You can change your name. You can change your address and so forth.

So, yes, I'm happy to make that available. We have -- it's very extensive. And states do take different approaches. Some of them allow commercial use of the lists. Most don't. Some of them charge a lot of money to get the lists, which is another way of limiting, I guess. I think one state, I think it was Alabama, charges \$30,000 dollars to get the list. So, there's a lot of different approaches to this.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): And so what would you say back in repose to the concerns of the Freedom of Information Commission and other advocates? You know, how do we find this balance? You know, they

talk about their concerns about, you know, how this would be enforced and who would be monitoring for any sort of violation if this were to pass.

SECRETARY MERRILL: You mean the part about commercial use and who gets to define what's commercial use?

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Yeah, yeah.

SECRETARY MERRILL: It would be our office. And I think there are some pretty clear definitions that could be used. And I know that's been the concern, particularly coming from people who sell lists, frankly particularly political lists. So, I think there's ways to handle it, which is pretty clear when people are basically data mining the list. We've had one gentleman who's been putting our lists on his website, on the web, and making money by telling people that the State of Connecticut is -- this horrible secretary of state is selling their data. And if you want your name off this list, you just pay him \$5 dollars and he'd be happy to take it off. I don't know how much money he's made doing that, but it's been quite notorious.

So those are the kinds of things we'd be looking to prevent and I don't -- you know, we'd have to work on a definition of commercial to make sure we still allow the legitimate use of the lists for legitimate political activity, so.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): So, thank you. I don't expect that you would have already seen this, but the Freedom of Information Commissioner, their testimony, their written testimony that they've submitted to us, they talk about two general reasons why transparency in this area is important. And the

first area, they reference the use of public records by the media to investigate election law violations. Under this proposal, would there be any limitation to the medial accessing that kind of information?

SECRETARY MERRILL: No, there would not, because they are a legitimate public interest, as opposed to data mining and commercial use. So, I don't see that this would impact their ability to get information. But I always go back to the fact that when people give us their names to be voters, they're not expecting that it's gonna be used for other purposes. And I sort of respect that in the public mind because, you know -- I know it's been said, well, what are people worried about, their information is already out there on the web. I just don't think it's the job of the government, who's collecting a list for purposes of voting, to be making it accessible for other purposes, and I don't think people expect that to be the case.

But, for that reason, we've taken a very -- I think a very moderate approach by just suggesting that you just give out the birth year and now the exact date, because that's the data that will prevent someone from stealing your identity. That's, I think, the thing I'm concerned about. But it's a very moderate approach. There are states that don't give out any of that information, any birth date at all, and as I said, make it much more expensive to acquire the list to begin with, including for the media. So, I don't know. I think it's -- I understand their concern, but I don't think there's anything in this that would deprive the media of the information they need.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Thank you for that. And their second concern with regards to transparency outlines scenarios regarding the former Georgia secretary of state, now governor, and concerns about how his -- how he used his role in overseeing the voter registration rolls and also concerns about a North Carolina congressional district and concerns about the election that happened there. And again, the concern of the commission is that there wouldn't be the ability to scrutinize these kinds of scenarios the same way if this proposal were to pass.

SECRETARY MERRILL: See, I don't agree with that because all we're suppressing is the actual date of birth. We're still giving out the information of who's on the voter roll, which clearly -- certainly, at least the elections officials certainly need to know who's on the rolls, and the public deserves the transparency of that. The only thing we're taking away is the date of birth, not even the year. And so I don't think this restricts very much their ability to figure out who's on the voter rolls. It also doesn't restrict -- I mean, if you're getting back to whether or not the media as opposed to someone data mining would be able to get the list by buying it, I don't think it impacts that either, so.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Okay. And then lastly, I would just say with regards to this, I know that I have heard -- have worked with a number of domestic violence victims who are concerned about registering to vote with having their address, in particular, and other identifying information so freely available, and we have a system in place to help people like that and that's been in place for a long time. But I do think that this potentially has some

chilling effect on maybe even other people or domestic violence victims who might not know of the system that's available to help protect them. Have you seen that this has a chilling effect in terms of people's desire to put their name on the voter registration rolls?

SECRETARY MERRILL: I believe it does. I'm not sure we've ever collected data about it. And as a matter of fact, we did make a proposal last year to expand the Safe at Home Program to anyone who feels threatened in any way, that they'd be able to suppress their data and just go through our office. I still think it's a good idea. There are states that do that as well and they haven't seen a big surge in people wanting to do that. But it is a problem, you know, and I would still support the idea of expanding the program to anyone who is feeling fearful. Because, you know, I'm sure if I were the victim of domestic violence, I would be very concerned if my name, especially when we know that there are people putting this information out on the internet, you know, and claiming that we're selling their data. So, it's clearly out there and I do think it has a chilling effect.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Thank you. Thank you very much for that and thank you again for your testimony this afternoon. Thanks for being here for so long with us.

SECRETARY MERRILL: Thank you very much for your attention, really.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): that will conclude the first hour that is reserved for elected officials and state agencies. So, with that, we will begin to alternate between the two lists. And the first

person on the public sign up list is Samuel Oliker-Friedland. And Samuel will be followed by Paula Perlman.

MR. OLIKER-FRIEDLAND: (Audio cuts out) modern elections and I'm testifying today in support of S.B. 233, in particular in support of the provisions codifying, strengthening and expanding automatic voter registration in Connecticut. The people of this state and the people in this room care deeply about the integrity of our voter rolls and the fairness of our elections. And key to that is ensuring that the voter rolls are accurate, complete and secure. automatic voter registration does just that.

It is a reform that's been enacted by republican legislatures, democratic legislatures, republican co-sponsors and democratic co-sponsors, and signed by republic and democratic governors across New England including Maine, Massachusetts, Vermont and Rhode Island. It's been implemented faithfully and enthusiastically by republican and democratic secretaries of states across the county including those in Colorado, Nevada, Illinois, republican secretaries in Washington, and in fact, the secretary of state that Senator Flexer just mentioned from Georgia, Mr. Brian Kemp, who's now the governor.

I'm gonna deviate briefly from my prepared remarks, actually, because I think Senator Sampson actually made a very good point in his earlier questioning of the secretary of state that I want to emphasize as a reason to actually support the automatic voter registration provisions in this bill. automatic voter registration takes interactions that citizens

are already having with the government. The most secure interactions that citizens are having with the government, at the DMV, at DSS when citizens apply for Husky Health.

These are interactions where people are -- have to provide already actually a dizzying array of documents, not just sort of saying who they are and that they are citizens, but proving their United States Citizenship, proving their residence address, proving their date of birth. It takes that information in these incredibly secure contacts and uses that information to register those people to vote at the proper address. This actually addresses, I think, the concerns of almost everyone in this room concerning that unregistered citizens become registered to vote, but also that the voter rolls are accurate and that people are not registered in the wrong place and that the voter rolls do not include extraneous records.

In other states, we see generally approximately an 80/20 split. Twenty percent of users of automatic voter registration are new registrants who are eligible citizens who are not on the voter rolls and about eighty percent are really updates, folks who are registered at one address in the state and use AVR to become registered at a different address in the state. This -- by using the -- and this is where I want to actually zero in on what Senator Sampson mentioned. It's one of the best ways to actually de-duplicate the voter registration list because what AVR does is it makes sure that every registration record comes through with, for example, a driver's license number.

The DMV, for every AVR client, is sending over the driver's license number. The secretary of state's staff who do that work can use that driver's license number to find which town that person has previously registered to vote in, make sure that they're taken off the rolls in the previous town, and put on the rolls in the new town where they've moved to and are now re-enfranchised in. It does this more securely and more efficiently and more cost-effectively than paper.

Let's be honest, it's 2020, there's an incredible amount of attention being paid to the election coming up later this year. And the alternative is not people not registering to vote. The alternative is a wasteful and inefficient paper process where people will go door to door with clipboards and piles of papers, registering people to vote, giving registrars additional work to do and costing them money. A famous study showed that processing a paper voter registration form costs local election officials eighty-three cents per registration form. Processing an electronic registration record costs four cents. It's also more accurate.

One of the biggest things that can lead to inaccuracies on the voter rolls that Senator Sampson mentioned is actually the failure to de-duplicate properly when people, for example, move between two towns.

As I mentioned, my last name is Oliker-Friedland. If anyone can spell that, I will give you an award. If I fill out a paper form, I'd say there's a pretty good chance that someone's gonna make a mistake when typing that into the voter registration system. Even if they don't make that mistake, sometimes my name is spelled with a hyphen, sometimes it's not

spelled with a hyphen. The best way to actually accurately de-duplicate that record is to use my driver's license number. It's a number. It will attach to any different, you know, maybe a different spelling of my name that I use at the DMV versus my previous record. And make sure that I'm registered at the proper place where I can vote, but also in only one place.

This -- AVR does a better job of this than almost any other way we use to de-duplicate the rolls. I'm a former attorney at the Department of Justice's Voting Section, for republican and democratic presidents, where we worked on ensuring election integrity and ensuring the federal law around voter rolls being kept up to date, are followed. This does a better job than anything I've ever seen in keeping voter rolls accurate and complete. This is about basic government efficiency.

Citizens are interacting with the DMV. They're interacting with DSS. They're interacting with Husky Health. They're showing documents that prove their citizenship. These agencies are running their social security numbers against federal databases in the case of DSS and Husky Health to determine who is and is not a citizen. And then those records are transmitted securely electronically and accurately to your registrars of voters, who register these people to vote. These transactions also update addresses, as I mentioned, when they interact with these agencies so that these citizens don't need to fill out duplicative paper registrations.

At the Center for Secure and Modern Elections, we work across the country to ensure that all eligible voices -- eligible voters are able to have their

voices heard and have their votes counted. We've seen firsthand the benefits of AVR and strongly support this commonsense, bipartisan legislation in other states to modernize Connecticut's elections, register thousands of new eligible voters, and move Connecticut's election system into the future. For the reasons I've mentioned, I strongly urge your support of automatic voter registration in Connecticut. Thank you.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Thank you. Thank you for your testimony. Just for purposes of accurate record keeping, is there a hyphen or no hyphen?

MR. OLIKER-FRIEDLAND: Depends if you look at my birth certificate or my driver's license.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): I want to know what your --
(Laughter)

MR. OLIKER-FRIEDLAND: I do use a hyphen, yes.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Okay. Thank you. Are there questions from members of the committee?
Representative Fox.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you, Senator Flexer. Good afternoon. Thank you for your testimony today. Can you just give me general overall information of the other states that have implemented the timeframe -- the other states, the timeframe within which they did it?

MR. OLIKER-FRIEDLAND: Yeah. So this is -- there's over twenty states now that have implemented automatic voter registration. It's a wide variety of different kinds of states in different parts of the country. As I mentioned, among your neighbors, Maine, Massachusetts and Vermont have all -- and

Rhode Island have all implemented automatic voter registration with bipartisan bills passing through their legislatures and signed by their republican or democratic governors. It's been passed in states as different as California, Alaska, West Virginia, Georgia, Utah, Illinois. These are all states that have found this to be a reform that really sort of brings the concerns of everyone in the states together and ensure that these rolls are both complete and accurate.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you. And I think the point that you highlighted was accuracy, which I think is very key. Could you just drill down on that point a little more, how you have accuracy in other -- this type of program can emphasize that?

MR. OLIKER-FRIEDLAND: Absolutely. It's -- you know, as I mentioned, I think one of the greatest benefits of this program is that when the voter rolls are accurate that means that people are enfranchised. When you don't -- when you're not registered in the wrong town and when the rolls are not -- do not include ineligible registrants that means more people can vote where they're actually eligible. And this program does that. It turns out that - you know, we've done focus groups on that and people think that when they tell one branch of the government they've moved, that branch of the government should tell everyone. They're -- people are confused that when they tell the DMV they moved, that doesn't necessarily tell the secretary of state they moved. Or when they tell -- when they apply for a government benefit or file their taxes that doesn't automatically populate their new address in every government agency.

So, this actually conforms voter rolls to the way the -- most people actually think our government already works. And again, it does that in a way that -- there's no advantage to keeping people registered at the wrong address. This just sort of -- this is an -- this is a policy of government efficiency that when someone tells the DMV that they moved, when someone tells DSS that they moved, that moves their voter record with them and then they're able to have their voice heard in the new place. And then their old town has more accurate rolls as well because the AVR process will remove that duplicate registration, as Senator Sampson mentioned, from the old town.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you. Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Thank you. Are there any other questions from members of the committee? Seeing none. Thank you again for your testimony.

MR. OLIKER-FRIEDLAND: Thank you.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Next is Paula Perlman, who will be followed by Matthew Kauffman.

MS. PERLMAN: Good afternoon, Senator Flexer, Representative Fox and members of the GAE Committee. I'm Paula Perlman, a staff attorney with the Freedom of Information Commission. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today about House Bill 5277 and Senate Bill 234.

With respect to Senate Bill 234, the commission opposes portions of this bill that restrict access to voter information. Title 9 of the General Statutes is replete with provisions that explicitly mandate public access to voter registration records,

provisions that have been in law for decades. The commission submits that this is because the legislature has long recognized that voting is a sacred right, one that is safeguarded by transparency. And transparency is important because it is a means to deter and detect voter fraud and it's also a means to deter and detect election fraud by ensuring that registration and election officials who are charged with entering, updating and maintaining voted data are accountable. Carry out their roles in accordance with the law.

Accessibility to voter information ought to provide confidence in the voting system itself. I would like to turn to specific sections of the bill. Section 1a1 prohibits the use of voter registration information for any commercial purpose as determined by the secretary of state. Outlawing specific uses for public information sets a dangerous precedent. The entire landscape of open government in Connecticut based on a premise that individuals not identify their reason or purpose for obtaining public records. If the information is public, it is public to all.

Also, this section provides no true definition of what constitutes commercial purpose. It also ignores the possibility that commercial enterprises may use government information in a manner that benefits voters. For example, a company may use the information to advertise inexpensive transportation to the polls for voters who have mobility difficulties. Section 1a1 also leaves the determination regarding the use of voter information to the secretary of state, making the secretary the sole decision maker as to whom is allowed access to

public records. It is ripe for subjectivity and abuse.

The commission is also concerned that the provision prohibiting the reproduction or displaying the voter information may be unconstitutional.

Moving on to section 1-2 -- 1-- excuse me, 182, which limits access to voters' date of birth to the year of birth unless the voter registration information is requested and used for governmental purpose, as determined by the secretary of state, then the voter's complete date of birth will be provided. Dates of birth are necessary to determine voter eligibility and to guard against voter fraud. The commission contends that if access is restricted, a better approach would be to have the month and year of birth remain accessible.

Also, as with the phrase, commercial purpose, the phrase, governmental purpose, is unclear and should be defined. Otherwise, one public official, again, is the sole determiner of who gets access to voter information. Without a clear definition, the lines as to whom gets access and who does not remain blurred.

Lastly, the commission objects to section 1c, which imposes a fine if voter information is obtained or used not in accordance with the new prohibition. The language is vague and as written unworkable. How will the fines be enforced to impose the fine?

And just quickly on House Bill 5277. The commission does support this bill. We believe it establishes a reasonable fee structure, reducing copying fees for public records and has the definition of a handheld scanner to align with the loss of the modern day

technology. Thank you. I'd be happy to answer any questions.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Thank you. Thank you for your testimony. Are there questions from members of the committee? Representative Fox.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you. Thank you for appearing today. In terms of 234, you indicate that you are supportive of the year and the month or the year and the date.

MS. PERLMAN: The month and the year.

REP. FOX (148TH): The month and the year.

MS. PERLMAN: But leaving out the day.

REP. FOX (148TH): Okay. And the idea being that it's, in your opinion, still narrows down to some privacy, but not all -- all -- not a total, I guess, open.

MS. PERLMAN: Correct.

REP. FOX (148TH): Okay. And is this similar to any other -- any legislation you've heard about in other states? Do you know?

MS. PERLMAN: Not that I'm aware of, but I could look into it.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you. Thank you for being here today.

MS. PERLMAN: And actually, if I may, just to address something that the secretary stated earlier. She talked about how this would be -- it's a moderate approach and that, you know, the media -- there's nothing in the proposal that would keep the media from obtaining access. I don't think that's

clear. When you look at the definitions that have been provided in the ask for a commercial purpose as well as for the governmental purpose, I think -- it has a phrase in there that says including, but not limited to. So, it really would be in the hands of the secretary of state to determine what it is that's a commercial purpose or what is a governmental purpose. So, I think that if those provisions are to be kept in there, it should be defined more clearly. Thank you.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Thank you. Thank you for that. Can you expand on what that could be? Is there a way to find -- to compromise here? Accomplish your goals, which I think this committee respects, and also what the secretary of state's proposing.

MS. PERLMAN: Well, I think, at least with respect to governmental purpose, this is something that we talked about and we came up with a definition. I mean, we have to give it some more thought. But perhaps for governmental purpose it could be a study. I have it here. It means any activity that is designed to carry out a function of government that expressly applies mandated or authorized by law. So, narrowing it a little bit more to what is truly a function that's conducted by a government.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): I'm sorry, that language you just read, where were you reading that from?

MS. PERLMAN: No, that was something that we had in the office, at the commission.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Suggested.

MS. PERLMAN: It's suggested.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): But it's not in your testimony?

MS. PERLMAN: No, it's not in the testimony.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Do you mind sharing it with us?

MS. PERLMAN: Oh, not at all.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Okay. Great. And you referenced that because of this, you are not certain that the concerns about the media and transparency and the media being able to access the information that they need to investigate ethics -- election law violations. Do you think that would accomplish that goal, that change?

MS. PERLMAN: Changing the recommendation that we made? I'm --

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): I guess what I'm saying is I'd be happy to -- I would love to see any suggestions you have on how to make this better so that the concerns that you've laid out here are clearer.

MS. PERLMAN: Well, I think that the -- for the purpose of the government, I think the -- and I do know there is someone from CCFOI, the Connecticut Council on Freedom of Information is here. So, perhaps he could address it better. But that at least having the month and year of birth accessible to the media, even if it's not for a governmental purpose, I think that would, obviously, satisfy them. Because the issue is the fact that it's the secretary of state that is going to be making the determination of what that is it. I'm not sure if that answers your question.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Okay. So, perhaps if it was another entity that made that determination, perhaps a clearly nonpartisan entity? Would that give you comfort?

MS. PERLMAN: I think more comfort would be with a clearer definition of governmental purpose.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Okay. And not with whoever oversees the maintenance of this.

MS. PERLMAN: As long as it's in sync -- I -- you know, I'd have to get back to you on that. But I believe that it's two parts. It's whether the definition is clearer and if it's clear enough, if it's narrow enough, then the secretary of state would have to adhere by those guidelines. So, maybe it wouldn't be as much of a concern. But I would have to get back to you on that.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Okay. And what do you think to the secretary of state's testimony earlier this morning that forty other -- forty-eight other states have some sort of protections for the privacy of voter information and we don't? Is Connecticut just at the forefront of public disclosure of all things or?

MS. PERLMAN: Well, I'd first have to say that they haven't shared that with us. So, I would have to see what -- if they provided that information to us so we could take a look at it. I mean, one of the biggest issues is that we have -- it's like jumping in and overhauling this whole system without a careful study. And perhaps we all could, you know, sit down and have, like, a task force or a study, just so that everyone, you know, has all the facts. And right now, like, we're not aware of what the

other forty-eight states. We know what some states are doing, but not -- I don't know what those forty-eight states are doing.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Okay. And I appreciate your suggestion. I would just say that we've been looking at this for more than five years, and I don't know if you get the sort of feedback in your office, but I can say that this is a common complaint, as the secretary said, that she gets. It's a common complaint that we get as well, the shock that people have with how much of their information is out there. So, if that's the only way to potentially find consensus, then maybe that's the route to go. But, you know, we've been studying this and every year goes by, and people's information is still out there for anyone to use for any purpose, so. All right. Well, thank you very much for your testimony.

MS. PERLMAN: Thank you.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Oh -- yeah, Representative -- I'm sorry. Representative France.

REP. FRANCE (42ND): Thank you, Madam Chair. And thank you for your time and your testimony.

MS. PERLMAN: Thank you.

REP. FRANCE (42ND): It sounds to me, if I saw it, that your concern about privacy discretion in an individual, in this case the secretary of the state, is that -- not to say political, but you're still allowing one individual to potentially make changes to that definition that doesn't -- it wouldn't come back to the legislature, as an example. And I think if even you had an independent, nonpartisan body doing that same thing. But it sounds to me like

what you're suggesting is that those definitions for commercial versus not commercial should be defined in the statute in a way that is clear and then that basically the secretary of state would just implement the action. Is that what you're ascribing or recommending?

MS. PERLMAN: I think it would address some of our concerns. It's just that it's so broad at this point that it really leaves a lot of discretion in the hands of one person. Whereas, like, if it was more narrowly defined and perhaps it wouldn't be as much of a concern.

REP. FRANCE (42ND): And I guess to echo what the Chair said, if you had recommendations for those definitions that would certainly be a starting point for the committee to consider. Moving on. the second -- what would be the impact that your agency sees in limiting to just year. So, what are the sum potential impacts that you would be concerned about if only the year was available in the record as opposed to month and year or the full birthday?

MS. PERLMAN: I think one -- the one thing that comes to mind is that -- with respect to, perhaps, voter eligibility, having just the year you don't necessarily know if that individual is eligible to vote at the time of the election, whereas having the month and year would give a better idea and narrow it down if he or she was eligible to vote at that point. So, that's just one example that I can come up. That just having the year of birth might not help. You would have to have the month and year.

REP. FRANCE (42ND): Okay. Thank you very much. Thank you, Madam Chair.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Thank you, Representative. Are there any questions from members of the committee? Seeing none. Thank you again for your testimony.

MS. PERLMAN: Thank you.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Next is Matthew Kauffman, followed by Peter Lewandowski.

MR. KAUFFMAN: Good afternoon, Senator Flexer, Representative Fox and honorable members of the committee. My name is Matthew Kauffman. I'm vice president of the Connecticut Council on Freedom of Information and I'm here today to speak on two bills, House Bill 5277, AN ACT DECREASING FEES FOR COPYING PUBLIC RECORDS, and Senate Bill 234, AN ACT CONCERNING VOTER PRIVACY PROTECTION. You have my full written testimony. I respectfully ask that you review it.

In the interest of time, let me say that CCFOI supports House Bill 5277, which is a fair compromise that will give citizens greater access to their government.

As for Senate Bill 234, we strongly oppose this bill and urge the committee to reject it. This bill contains fatally vague language, vests far too much discretionary power in the hands of this or any future secretary of the state and it will make it harder to root out the sort of election irregularities that we saw not long ago in Bridgeport. Senate Bill 234 would ban the use of voter-registration information for "any commercial purpose, as determined by the secretary of the state." And specifically lists harassment,

soliciting and republication as examples of banned commercial purposes.

Serious forms of harassment are already criminalized in our statutes, leaving it up to anyone, I think, to guess how that term might applied in this case. Soliciting, similarly, a very vague and broad term, but seems to me would certainly ban sort of campaign literature that we've all seen sort of filling our mailboxes. The ban on republication is particularly troubling as that would seem to bar news outlets from using or publishing voter information in the context of, say, a story about voter fraud. The media enjoy a very broad protection under our state and federal constitutions. And this committee should proceed very cautiously on any proposal that is at odds with those constitutional mandates.

The bill would also reduce -- restrict access to the full date of birth for a voter except for, as defined by the secretary of state, again, a governmental purpose. Like commercial purpose, governmental purpose is impossibly vague and would put an important law at the whim of any future secretary of the state. This restriction would also weaken the integrity of elections by making it difficult for medial outlets to expose voting irregularities. We've seen this in Bridgeport where election problems unearthed in part by matching absentee voters to voter registration information, something that is difficult to do without the full DOB.

The ability of the medial and other outside organizations to play a watchdog role in the administration of elections diminishes -- is diminished under this proposal. And when outside

accountability is weakened, trust in government is weakened as well. Perhaps more importantly, restricting the date of birth is a solution to a nonexistent problem. This section was prompted by concern about identity theft, and I can tell you amassing dates of birth is not how identity thieves operate.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Mr. Kauffman, if you wouldn't summarizing.

MR. KAUFFMAN: I will, very briefly. Thank you.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Thank you.

MR. KAUFFMAN: What identity thieves want is social security numbers and financial account numbers and they get that through these large data breaches that we've seen. So, in summary, the language in this bill is woefully vague, likely unconstitutional, and hands too much discretionary power to the secretary of the state, and it will unwittingly make it easier for people to cheat during elections and get away with it. On behalf of the Connecticut Council for Freedom of Information, I urge you to reject this bill. I'm happy to answer any questions.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Thank you. Thank you for your testimony. Are there questions from members of the committee? Representative Fox.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you, Senator Flexer. Good afternoon, sir, thank you for your testimony today. Just a quick, without being too broad or overly burdensome, how do you go about voter privacy legislation then? If all these other states have done it -- your testimony, I appreciate it and take it to heart, but how, perhaps, wrongly incorrectly

written or drafted this bill may be, how do you go about pursuing something of this?

MR. KAUFFMAN: So, I will tell you. And, I mean, to answer the question of how is that Connecticut stands alone in something like this. I think the answer is yes, we are more advanced in public information and making the information that government has available to the public. I can give an example. I was a journalist for thirty-two years at the *Courant* of times when having broad access like this made a real difference for the people of Connecticut.

So, the one thing that I heard here that I thought, yes, this seems like something troubling that would be appropriate perhaps to take up was Chairwoman Flexer's comment about date of birth with regard to medical information. I've had that experience. You call on the phone, they want to know what's your DOB and then they're happy to, you know, do that. At CVS Pharmacy, sort of that does it. That's a different discussion, I think, in a different bill in terms of how medical offices should operate with that. But in terms of restricting access to it for all purposes in order to restrict that one area, I mean, I can tell you I think the value of having the full date of birth outweighs the concerns, perhaps with the one exception of that medical information that perhaps could be taken up in a different bill.

I can tell you, at the *Courant*, we used the full date of birth in stories in past years, identifying school bus drivers with felony records, with bad motor vehicle records. We identified home improvement contractors with felony convictions that should have restricted their access to those permits

and did not. School buses are safer because the media had access to the full date of birth. We've seen enough election irregularities and the media playing a role in exposing those, to see the value of this. If there were this widespread epidemic of people using dates of birth to steal identities, I think we'd be in a different situation here.

But the calls, I suspect, that the secretary of the state has gotten, shocked that this information is out there, I think if the next question was tell me about your identity stolen. Oh, no, no, my identity wasn't stolen. I'm just shocked that that information is out there. I think there is a certain mythology that that infor -- you know, give me my date of birth and your identity's a goner. My date of birth, October 5, 1961; for any identity thieves out there, have at it, I checked this morning is on the internet in forty-four different places.

I have had my credit cards cancelled multiple times, not because some identity thief said let's go after Kauffman, it's because of these enormous data breaches that the secretary of the state mentioned this morning, where millions of people, in one fell swoop, have information, real information; social security information, financial account information, you know, gathered in one fell swoop. So, in terms of how do we protect voter privacy, I think my response is the good news is the information that is given out there that may feel private, is not for the most part being used for nefarious purposes.

Frankly, it's kind of an expensive list. You know, we don't want people making money off of the list. The state makes money off the list and I'm kind of

okay with that. We are the state. If I want to, you know, sell you a new roof or seamless gutters, you know, I've got access to cheaper, broad mailing lists, frankly, than the secretary of the state's list. So, I know for those of you in government who interact with the public, it's probably difficult for me to say, hey, it's not a big deal, right. Your constituents and the like have another view of this.

So, my response, though, is how do we craft voter privacy legislation, I think is maybe we can do more voter education about the fact that this sort of information isn't really in, you know, horribly nefarious hands the way you may think it is. You know, rest easy, that information which is used for valuable purposes in other respects is generally not being used for the kinds of things that you fear.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you very much.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Thank you, Representative. Are there other questions from members of the committee? Okay. I just -- I have a few follow ups, just a follow up on that conversation we've been having about this.

MR. KAUFFMAN: Sure.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): The -- when you were just talking a few moments ago about the investigations into bus drivers and other folks, the information where you verified the identity of those people and their records, that was taken from the voter list in order to do that?

MR. KAUFFMAN: Yeah.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Okay. That's helpful to know. And you think that this proposal, even with some of the changes we've been talking about this morning, where things might be a little bit more clearly identified, would continue to make it so you couldn't obtain that information despite what the secretary said?

MR. KAUFFMAN: Right. So in terms of -- the key issue there is the date of birth in terms of access, right, if -- well again, is -- you know, the media is for profit in many respects. Is that a commercial purpose? I mean, there are real problems with what is and is not a commercial purpose. And I think a real problem, having people other than the people in, you know, this room making those determinations. It essentially turns the secretary of the state into a lawmaker. It says a commercial purpose is whatever the secretary of the state says it is. And if the next secretary of the state disagrees, then it isn't a commercial purpose. And I think that's truly problematic.

In terms of if it were clarified sort of in that first section, the media have access to this information. And there's the second section, which is full date of birth. When we had a list of school bus drivers in Connecticut and we are looking to track them down for other information; is that this person, did they connect with, you know, a criminal record database and the like, and the same with the contractors, just having the year doesn't give you, if you have, you know, a large database, a good match there if you're sort of trying to say is this person really the same as this person.

Attorney Perlman had talked about doing month and year. You know, I thought about, you know, month and day. At least when you're doing, you know, with a computer program, a matching there, if you just have the year, you know, you've got a 1 in 365 chance that these two people are the same. And name and DOB, you have a pretty good match there. It's not a guarantee. But when we're trying to identify is this person also this person, it's pretty good there. Month and year, might be okay with that. Month and day, might be okay with that.

Again, I sort of come back to I wish what we had is a greater understanding of the public, that regardless of what Frank Abagnale said in, *Catch Me If You Can*, people are not taking your name and date of birth and stealing your identity. All of our names and date of births are out there, right. We know they're in the voting records and the like. I don't know if anyone in this room has had their identity authentically stolen. If they have, if anyone could point to, yeah, and I was individually targeted because this information was out there, as opposed to, hey, I shopped at Target once and now me and 7 million of my fellow citizens have their information out there. I mean, that's -- that's where, you know, the organized criminal gangs are getting their information and it's how they're using it to take people's identity.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): I appreciate that, but you do not believe you would still have access to this information because you believe the media could be construed under the current definition of this proposal as a commercial purpose.

MR. KAUFFMAN: Well, the commercial purpose doesn't restrict access to the date of birth. It's the governmental purpose that restricts access to the full date of birth. I think if we were to poll people, perhaps polling people on the penal there, what is a governmental purpose? Is running for office a governmental purpose? Maybe, maybe not. Is writing stories about government for a for-profit news operation a governmental purpose? Maybe, maybe not.

As a former journalist, it's easy to say, yes, let's do a carve-out for the media. Well, in 2020, that's harder to do, right, of sort of what is the media. And in general, Connecticut has always been really good about sort of rejecting that idea. At the federal level, you know, there are different fees for commercial requestors under FOI, and federal laws say, oh, but the media are specifically, even if for-profit, not defined as commercial. We haven't done that in Connecticut. And generally under the idea, as Attorney Perlman had mentioned, when information is public, we want it to be public for all.

So, I think, yes, it may -- my sort of somewhat selfish concerns could be addressed by having a clear, specified carve-out for the media. It raises some other sort of broader issues. One, about what is the media in 2020, and the idea of giving any class of citizens sort of different rights than another class of citizens when it comes to public information.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Thank you. If you have any further suggestion on language here, I think that would be really helpful. And I appreciate your

earlier comments about the sensitivity and the legitimate concern with regard to medical records and I can just say that, while having your identity stolen is a truly horrible thing, having your personal medical information violated is much more horrific.

MR. KAUFFMAN: Yeah, I don't know that there's disagreement here.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): And I think this it's a very serious concern.

MR. KAUFFMAN: Yeah.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Any other questions from members of the committee? Thank you again for your testimony.

MR. KAUFFMAN: All right, thank you. And if we can come up with some suggestions, we'll get it to the committee. All right. Thank you very much, everyone.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Thank you. Next is Peter Lewandowski, who will be followed by Luther Weeks.

MR. LEWANDOWSKI: Good afternoon, Senator Flexer, Representative Fox, Senator Sampson, Representative France, and distinguished committee members. My name is Peter Lewandowski, executive director of the Office of State Ethics. Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony in support of three raised bills that contain legislative proposals presented by the Office of State Ethics. I've submitted written testimony on the three bills and I will summarize it here in order of priority to our agency.

First, I would like to say a few words in support of House Bill 5283, AN ACT CONCERNING MUNICIPAL ETHICS, which is priority number one bill for the Office of State Ethics and Citizen's Ethics Advisory Board. This bill requires all municipalities to adopt and maintain a code of ethics no later than October 1, 2021. The bill reflects compromised language reached between the Office of State Ethics, Connecticut Conference of Municipalities and Connecticut Council of Small Towns. My understanding is that both CCM and COST are submitting testimony regarding this bill.

The language of this bill passed the Senate on consent as an amendment to Senate Bill 1095 during the last days of last year's legislative session. The provisions in this bill stem from the work conducted by the Citizen's Ethics Advisory Board's Subcommittee on Municipal Ethics. The subcommittee, in consultation with CCM and COST, determined that at this time the best approach concerning municipal ethics is to require all municipalities in Connecticut to have a code of ethics.

This bill makes it clear that any municipality that has adopted a code of ethics prior to January 1, 2021, and most of them already have, shall not be required to adopt a new code of ethics. Such municipalities will only be required to certify that they have an ethics code in place and supply a copy of the code to the Office of State Ethics. Those municipalities that do not have an existing code of ethics may either adopt their own code or adopt a model code to be developed by the Office of State Ethics, in consultation with CCM and COST. In any event, it is up to each municipality to adopt an ethics code that fits their particular need.

Municipalities may utilize some, if not all, of the provisions of the model code to be developed by the Office of State Ethics.

The bill also requires the Office of State Ethics to submit a report to the GAE Committee on each municipality's compliance by January 1, 2023, and it authorizes the Office of State Ethics, within its available appropriations, to conduct a municipal ethics education program for municipal officials and employees, or organizations composed of municipal members.

Residents of Connecticut's towns and cities are entitled to have a government whose officials and employees uphold the highest ethical standards and who are provided with clear and basic guidelines to help them uphold such standards. The Office of State Ethics and the Citizen's Ethics Advisory Board encourage this Committee to support this bill.

The second bill I would like to bring to your attention is Senate Bill 237, AN ACT CONCERNING CONFLICTS OF INTEREST DUE TO AN EMPLOYER OTHER THAN THE STATE UNDER THE STATE CODE OF ETHICS.

The purpose of the bill is to make necessary revisions to the code of ethics for public officials by adding a public official's and state employee's other, that is private employer, and the private employer of such official's or employee's spouse, to the conflicts of interest provisions under General Statutes section 1-85, which deals with direct and substantive conflicts, and General Statutes section 1-86, which addresses potential conflicts. It is important note that under section 1-85, even if amended by this bill, a public official or state employee does not have a substantial conflict of

interest and may take official action if any benefit or detriment accrues to no greater extent than to any other member of the profession, occupation or group of industry in question.

Under this bill, an elected official who is faced with such a conflict involving his or her other employer or the employer of the official or employee's spouse may either recuse himself or herself, or prepare a written statement and describe the matter requiring action and the nature of the conflict, and why he or she may act despite the conflict in the public interest. Again, the purpose of this requirement is to create transparency in the process. I should note that this bill passed the Senate unanimously during -- on two different occasions and most recently this past legislative session. The bill offers a longstanding opportunity to strengthen the critical conflicts of interest provisions under the code, ethics code, and the Office of State Ethics encourages members of the GAE Committee to support it again.

Finally, I would like to briefly comment in support of House Bill 5279, AN ACT REDEFINING PUBLIC OFFICIAL UNDER THE STATE CODE OF ETHICS. This bill amends the definition of a public official under both codes of ethics for public official and lobbyists, to include individuals appointed by any statewide elected officer and not just the governor.

Again, the purpose of this proposal is close an apparent loophole in the law under which individuals appointed by a statewide elected officer other than the governor are excluded from the definition of a public official, an, are, therefore, not subject to the ethics code. Thank you for your consideration

of our agency proposals and I look forward to working with the committee. And I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Thank you. Thank you for your testimony. Are there questions from members of the committee? Representative Fox.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you, Senator. And welcome.

MR. LEWANDOWSKI: Thank you.

REP. FOX (148TH): Congratulations on your new position, by the way.

MR. LEWANDOWSKI: Thank you.

REP. FOX (148TH): I look forward to working with you. Just very briefly, in 5279; the ACT REDEFINING A PUBLIC OFFICIAL UNDER THE STATE CODE OF ETHICS, so would that -- give me an example of who would be included within that, these appointments.

MR. LEWANDOWSKI: So, this would really apply to statewide elected officers, constitutional officers. So for example, we had a scenario several years ago where a lieutenant governor appointed members to, if you recall, the SIM Board, or the health -- when the initial reform of the -- of health care in the state was taking place. A number of officials -- or -- officials.

A number of individuals were appointed to that board by the lieutenant governor, and that automatically -- by that act, they were essentially excluded from the provisions of the code because they were appointed by the lieutenant governor and not the governor at the time. And again, in that case, board members exercised substantial authority of the state and expended substantial sums. The classic

examples of who fits under the definition of a public official. So, we believe that's a loophole. Again, it's not taking -- currently it's not taking place, but I think in going forward, if ever there was another similar scenario, this law would, or at least the amendment would address this issue.

REP. FOX (148TH): In terms of individuals who are appointed by, say, the speaker, the majority leader or minority leader, are they currently under the code of ethics?

MR. LEWANDOWSKI: Yes.

REP. FOX (148TH): Okay.

MR. LEWANDOWSKI: So, yeah, the full definition of a public official applies to folks -- currently to folks appointed by the governor or legislative leadership.

REP. FOX (148TH): Okay, okay.

MR. LEWANDOWSKI: Yeah.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you. And just a question of the municipal ethics bill.

MR. LEWANDOWSKI: Yeah.

REP. FOX (148TH): It's your understanding that all interested parties are now in agreement?

MR. LEWANDOWSKI: Yes, with respect to this -- the language that's before you.

REP. FOX (148TH): So that's the same bill that was finalized last session? That was last session?

MR. LEWANDOWSKI: That language stems from an amendment.

REP. FOX (148TH): Correct.

MR. LEWANDOWSKI: I think we originally proposed a different bill last year, and during the process, during the legislative session, we had a conversation and amended that original proposal. That's now reflected before you.

REP. FOX (148TH): I want to commend you on your efforts on that regard and thank you for your time today.

MR. LEWANDOWSKI: Thank you.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Thank you. Thank you, Representative. Are there any other questions? Representative France.

REP. FRANCE (42ND): Thank you, Madam Chair. Just one question related to the deadline for municipalities to have a code of ethics or they could voluntarily adopt a model language. What if they do neither? Is there a penalty envisioned for the municipality if they choose not to do either one or they don't see a value in doing that?

MR. LEWANDOWSKI: There is no proposed penalty. I think -- well, it's incumbent on the Office of State Ethics to report that fact to this committee. We are required by this bill to provide a report and, obviously, we would list who's in compliance and who's not. That's it.

REP. FRANCE (42ND): Thank you very much. Thank you, Madam Chair.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Thank you, Representative. Any other questions? Seeing none. Thank you again for your testimony.

MR. LEWANDOWSKI: Thank you.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Next is Luther Weeks, who will be followed by Representative Zupkus.

MR. WEEKS: Chairs and members of the committee, my name is Luther Weeks, executive director of CT Voters Count. Since 2008, I have been certified moderator. I have led polling places, election day registration twice, and central absentee counting. Today, I've submitted five pieces of testimony on six bills. The context for my testimony on four bills; that humans are not good at assessing risks. We can focus excessively on minor, all but nonexistent risks. We often minimize rare, catastrophic risks and ignore frequent familiar risks.

We also do a poor job of balancing the risks and rewards. I support S.B. 233. It would eliminate a longstanding civil rights violation and unnecessary election day registration work. It would remove the crosscheck requirement that results in massive extra work for officials, delays for voters, and has been the reason for the civil rights violation. I also direct you to the last paragraph of my written testimony on that bill. It would provide service for voters and it would resolve, I believe, the concerns that are being expressed by ROVAC.

I oppose S.B. 241. This bill is an example of excessive concern for all but nonexistent risks. It would require checkers to be appointed for all EDR locations and authorize unofficial checkers. Apparently, the proponents are unaware that there are no lists to check in EDR locations, leaving undefined what those people would do.

I oppose S.J. 15 and H.B. 5278 as written. These bills are examples of ignoring actual risks that occur frequently in Connecticut. Proven risks were expanded mail-in voting in Connecticut. When Connecticut passed the Citizens Election Program, part of the justification was a history of corruption. Similarly, avoiding expanded mail-in voting is justified by Connecticut's ongoing record of campaign and insider voting fraud via absentee. And I distinguish voter fraud from voting and fraud. Quite different things.

I do not oppose all early voting. I support in-person early voting. You can see my testimony for a low-cost, early voting method suited to Connecticut. I caution that contrary to intuition, the best science indicates that early voting in any form tends to decrease turnout, but only by a small amount, so there's some value to the enhanced customer service. I would also attach myself to the testimony from the SEC on S.B. 234. You can see my written testimony for, you know, the opinion of a very, very end-user of that information for political purposes, which might be intimidated and attacked for legitimate uses by that definition.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Thank you. Thank you for your testimony. Are there questions from members of the committee? Representative Fox.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Weeks, for being here today. Can you just expand a little for me on the idea that you had? If EDR -- if the crosscheck is eliminated, you mentioned --

MR. WEEKS: Sure. So -- and first, let me give you a background. That as far as I know, with the exception of maybe one state, no state that has used

EDR for years before we did does anything like our crosscheck. They check voters. In fact, many of those states check voters in every polling place without access to a central registration database like we do, because we're doing it in central locations in town. And without the crosscheck, then there's no reason that we have to treat the EDR votes like provisional ballots, where they're put in envelopes, where after we close the EDR, we go and treat them, not quite, but almost like the absentee ballots, that takes late into the evening to count them because of that process.

We could simply provide a scanner in that location and a ballot clerk and then they could go right into the scanner like every other voter's ballots go in. And at the end of EDR, which presumably might be 9 o'clock or something like that, you print the tape, just like we do every place else, and you've got your results. You don't have to go through this arduous, unnecessary process. And that would be better for the voters.

One of the big things about HAVA is that we should be telling voters when they over vote. When you have a scanner, if somebody over votes, the ballot's rejected with the ballot clerk. The person gets to re-vote so they're not over voting and have their vote counted, and especially many EDR voters are new or they new to voting in Connecticut with our equipment and they are the very people that are most likely to over vote by mistake.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you very much. I appreciate your time.

MR. WEEKS: Thank you.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Thank you, Representative. Any other questions? Seeing none. Thank you again for your testimony.

MR. WEEKS: Thank you.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Next is Representative Zupkus, who will be followed by Sue Larsen, who will be followed by Lizette Pelletier.

REP. ZUPKUS (89TH): Good afternoon, Senator Flexer, Representative Fox, Senator Sampson and Representative France. I'm glad to be here and I ask if you would be kind if I could yield my time to my constituent, Mr. Ron Lizzi.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Yes, as long as he identifies himself. Welcome.

MR. LIZZI: Madam Chair, Mr. Chairman, and members of the committee. My name is Ron Lizzi. I'm an author and engineer from Bethany.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): And Ron, if you don't mind me interrupting, when you're finished with your testimony if you wouldn't mind spelling your name for our committee clerk so that we can accurately record it, that would be wonderful.

MR. LIZZI: I'll do it right now.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Okay.

MR. LIZZI: L-I-Z-Z-I. Announced with a "T" sound to trick the clerk.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Thank you. Thank you.

MR. LIZZI: I support H.B. 5281, AN ACT CONCERNING UNCLAIMED PROPERTY, but it doesn't go far enough. AS shown in my written testimony, other states, like

Wisconsin, Illinois, Rhode Island and Louisiana automatically send checks to owners of unclaimed money without requiring claims. They use taxpayer data to determine an owner's current address. Connecticut should follow their lead. This state is not making a good faith effort to return unclaimed money, which total nearly \$1 billion dollars.

The bill calls for the treasurer to notify municipalities of unclaimed money that belongs to them. Again, the state should not require claims unless the ownership is in doubt. It should simply transfer the money to the municipalities with notification, as California does. For efficiency, this should be done annually, not continually, and not for small amounts of money. CTBigList.com currently only shows properties valued over \$50 dollars. The bill appears to require that all properties be shown. In conjunction with that change, the bill should also require that property values be shown on the website. Owners can then decide whether it's worth the effort to file a claim. Otherwise, the Treasurer's Office will be inundated with phone inquiries, increasing administrative costs.

California and Texas show the exact value of all properties and their administrators report no complaints. The bill requires that the unclaimed property list be easily accessible and searchable, but that is already the case. Instead, the bill should require that properties be easy to find, by name or address, which is not currently the case. The bill also calls for advertising of the property program. It would be more cost-effective to inform people through income tax forms or similar

interactions with the state. My written testimony includes a proposal for doing that.

Thank you for your efforts on this bill. I welcome any questions.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Thank you. Thank you for your testimony. Are there questions from members of the committee? Representative France.

REP. FRANCE (42ND): Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you for coming back to the committee with your proposals. I appreciate the conversations we've had in the past. Just more for information. I've met with the Treasurer's Office earlier this session and based on our conversations from past, they have issued an RFP to actually change the interface for that to allow not just string searching at the beginning, which was -- hasn't been the case in probably forty years, to actually allow the search of letter strings, etcetera, that are in the middle as opposed to having to do from the beginning of it.

So, they are entering into that as well as the other provisions that you've discussed here this morning. They anticipate that this summer they will have the RFP awarded to a contract, and ideally, by six months or so after that have it in place. So, we'll see what that looks like, but I just wanted to give you an update that your efforts have not been unheard and there is action moving in that direction right now within the Treasurer's Office. So, thank you for coming.

MR. LIZZI: Okay. I appreciate that.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Thank you, Representative. Are there other questions from members of the

committee? Seeing none. Thank you again for your testimony.

MR. LIZZI: Thank you.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Next is Sue Larsen, who will be followed by Lizette Pelletier, who will be followed by Timothy Beeble.

MS. LARSEN: Senator Flexer, Representative Fox and members of the GAE Committee. My name is Sue Larsen and I'm the president of ROVAC and I'm also the registrar in South Windsor. I am here to talk on S.B. 233.

The basic premise of where we're coming from on S.B. 233 as far as AVR is to make sure that registrars, ROVAC specifically, is involved in how some of these agencies put their programs together. To give you a quick example, Chris Prue from Vernon, he's the registrar there, and I worked with the Department of Corrections. We worked with advocacy groups on voter rights. We went down to the York facility to see how a program could work as far as registering women there that were there because their trial hadn't come up yet and they couldn't make bail, or they -- they're there because of a misdemeanor.

So, we worked with the Department of Corrections. We worked with advocacy groups and we've been trying to come up with a process which would be efficient for them and work out well for the town clerks and the registrars. So, that idea of working together is really important whenever you're starting to do any major process such as AVR, which is a great idea. It should definitely go forward.

The only other thing I would like to just quickly add is, you know, ROVAC has proposed a couple of

times the -- a municipal primary bill and we're really hoping that you will change your mind and bring it forward, for the safety of the students, the concerns of parents, and an efficient school day, which is interrupted by having an election in there during the normal session. So, thank you very much.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Thank you. Thank you for your testimony. Are there questions from members of the committee? Representative Fox.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you, Chair -- Chairwoman Flexer. And thank you, Ms. Larsen, for being here today. Good to see you again. One of the prior witnesses, Mr. Weeks, gave an example of an issue about EDR, the elimination of the crosscheck. Do you have any opinions on his testimony?

MS. LARSEN: Well, he's going along with the idea of no crosscheck. I think the integrity of the system, as far as the public is concerned, is crucial, so I do think we do need the crosscheck just to ensure that a person that's coming in and registering isn't registered in another town and voted in that town. So, from that standpoint, I'd say registrars want the crosscheck just to ensure the integrity of the system. And to me that's more important than somebody going in and taking five minutes of their time to fill out all the paperwork.

REP. FOX (148TH): Okay. Thank you very much. In terms of the AVR component, which you testified about ROVAC's involvement in the underlying discussions about the bill, have you been directly involved at all thus far in the implementation of AVR or?

MS. LARSEN: No.

REP. FOX (148TH): No. All right. All right.
Thank you very much.

MS. LARSEN: Okay. Thank you.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Thank you, Representative.
Thank you again for your testimony. Next is Lizette
Pelletier, followed by Timothy Beeble, followed by
Maria Greenslade.

MS. PELLETIER: Good afternoon Senator Flexer,
Representative Fox and distinguished members of the
Government Administration and Elections Committee.
My name is Lizette Pelletier and I am the state
archivist. I am here to express the State Library's
concerns regarding certain open-ended restrictions
on voter registration information contained in
Raised Senate Bill number 234.

I have submitted written testimony which I would
like to summarize now. The State Library's mission
includes making historical materials accessible to
the public, while respecting the privacy rights of
living individuals and adhering to statutory
confidentiality requirements. Our concern is that
the current wording of the bill's first section
would prohibit, not only just the active voter file,
but all records containing voter registration
information under CGS Title 9 from being made
available through the internet.

This restriction could significantly impact public
access to historical voter records in the state
archives and local historical societies. We have
built public-private partnerships with entities such
as Ancestry.com, which is a commercial vendor of
genealogical information, to mitigate the high costs

of digitizing records that involves considerable staff time and file storage resources. During the scanning process, staff unfold and properly orient each document, identify key information and attach it to the digital image, so that researchers can find it, and finally, check the image for legibility and the information for accuracy.

The commercial vendors take on these costs, which they recoup through subscriptions. The State Library gets digital images for free and is able to provide free access to the vendor's website through our website for Connecticut residents with a valid library card. Without a provision in the bill exempting historical records, these partnerships may no longer be available to us, because vendors do not want records that have redacted information or are totally blocked, that are valuable to their subscribers. Based on our prior experiences with historic education, mental health and criminal records, restrictions created to address current privacy issues end up being applied retroactively, because the statutes lack a specific exemption for historic records.

If we no longer have access to these partnerships, we may not be able to digitize records that are in our care. It is important to remember that records kept by the state archives include election records and they help to protect individual rights and entitlements, safeguard the public interest, and contribute to the story of Connecticut's collective experience.

We ask that raised bill number 234 be amended to exempt records that are seventy-five years or older from the redaction requirement and from the

prohibition against publication on the internet. The State Library welcomes the opportunity to work with the GAE to craft legislation that enables it to carry out its mission to preserve and make accessible Connecticut's history and heritage while protecting the privacy of its citizens. Thank you.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Thank you. Thank you for your testimony. Are there questions from members of the committee? Seeing none. Thank you again for your testimony. Next is Timothy Beeble, who will be followed by Maria Greenslade, who will be followed by Emily O'Hara.

MR. BEEBLE: Good afternoon, Senator Flexer, Representative Fox and members of the GAE Committee. My name is Timothy Beeble. I am the registrar of voters in the town of Bethel and I am vice chair of the ROVAC Legislative Committee. And I hereby submit this testimony. I'm submitted it in writing and I'll summarize it here. I'm speaking in support of Senate Bill 239, AN ACT CONCERNING AUDITING OF SIGNED STATEMENTS OF ELECTORS PRIOR TO VOTING.

Connecticut's election laws require THAT voters provide identification at the time that they vote. And anyone who's forgotten to bring their identification to the polling place or otherwise refuses to show it, can sign an affidavit and then provide their name, address and birth date. And again, in signing that affidavit, they are attesting that they are the elector who appears on the voting list. This form is rarely used and we don't see any problem with maintaining a log and reporting to the secretary of state afterwards.

I also want to testify on Senate Bill 241, AN ACT CONCERNING AUDITING OF ELECTION DAY REGISTRATION.

In lines 23-25, the bill opens the possibility of unofficial checkers and challengers to be present at EDR locations. And EDR locations are not considered polling places. Under current election law, unofficial checkers sit behind the official checkers at polling places and listen to the names and addresses of voters as they present their identification. Unofficial checkers may not speak or interact with the voters, nor the election officials. It's not clear how the unofficial checkers would be stationed and operate in an EDR location.

For clarification, the reference in lines 25-26 to administering an elector's oath individually. Just to be clear, this is done nonverbally by means of each EDR elector signing the printed oath. And perhaps the language of Senate Bill 241 could be clarified to specify this.

I also want to bring your attention to lines 41-43 that reflects the current, but flawed, language in 9-19j. As proof of residency, a prospective elector may submit a utility bill that has a due date that is not later than thirty days after the election. As written, any applicant for voter registration could present a utility bill that's a month old, a year old, a decade old, and it would meet this criteria. I think there was a mistake, whenever it was, six, eight years ago, and it should be corrected to say that the utility bill has a due date that is not earlier than thirty days before the election. And by changing these two words, only a current utility bill would be acceptable and decades old utility bills would not be useable as proof of residency.

Lines 147-172 provide the registrars of voters submitting a post-election report on EDR registrations. We don't see that that's going to be a big problem, and so we'd be fine with that. But I see my time has come to an end, so I will end it there.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Thank you. Thank you for your testimony. Are there questions from members of the committee? Representative Fox.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you, Madam Chair. And good afternoon, good to see you again, Mr. Beeble.

MR. BEEBLE: Thank you.

REP. FOX (148TH): Just a quick clarification. The correction that you proposed, what was that statute to? The correction, that was to what? The utility -- you give the utility bill and the --

MR. BEEBLE: In the bill, 241, it's lines 41-43. I could -- I'll have to see, you know, what paragraph that relates to. I wasn't sure whether in interacting here with the testimony that -- whether it'd be easier to do line numbers. Do you have the line numbers in front of you?

REP. FOX (148TH): I do, yes.

MR. BEEBLE: You do.

REP. FOX (148TH): So, lines -- repeat the lines again for me.

MR. BEEBLE: Forty-one through forty-three.

REP. FOX (148TH): So it's current law you're asking to be revised?

MR. BEEBLE: Yes.

REP. FOX (148TH): Okay.

MR. BEEBLE: I think most registrars are looking at this and thinking that it's a current bill. But when you really look at the actual words, it's -- how many bills do you receive that allow you more than thirty days to pay? I mean, I -- if you went in on November 3rd, you'd have a hard time presenting any utility bill that wouldn't meet that criteria.

REP. FOX (148TH): Okay. Thank you very much for your time.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Thank you, Representative. Senator Haskell.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Mr. Beeble, I just wanted to take the opportunity to say thank you for your tremendous work in Bethel and for being here to testify. While I missed the first portion of your testimony, luckily I have it in writing. So, I just wanted to weigh in and thank you for your patience today.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Thank you, Senator. Are there any other questions or comments from members of the committee? Seeing none. Thank you again for your testimony.

MR. BEEBLE: Okay. Thank you.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Next is Maria Greenslade, followed by Emily O'Hara, followed by Tanya Hughes.

MS. GREENSLADE: Good afternoon, Senator Flexer, Representative Fox and members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I'm here to testify in support of House Bill 5281, AN ACT CONCERNING

UNCLAIMED PROPERTY. I am Maria Greenslade, assistant treasurer of the Unclaimed Property Division within the Office of the State Treasurer.

Section one of the bill will help streamline the Treasury's Unclaimed Property Division by allowing for the acceptance of electronic copies for both claims and holder reports. In fiscal year 2019, Unclaimed Property Division paid about 17,000 rightful owners almost \$56 million dollars. During the same fiscal year, we received \$138 million dollars from businesses, banks and others holding unclaimed property. During the first seven months of fiscal year 2020, we have paid just about \$45 million dollars and are preparing to receive almost 6,000 holder reports within the next couple of weeks. This is a lot of paper. So, we're looking forward to working with the committee.

Section one of the bill -- excuse me. We are in the final stages, as Representative France indicated earlier, of choosing a vendor, after an extensive request for a proposal process, that will bring technology efficiencies to our claims and holder reporting process. This bill will permit the Unclaimed Property Division to immediately apply those new capabilities once the system is implemented. However, given the uncertainty of the timetable for contract negotiations and for implementation, the office respectfully requests the language in section 1 be changed to be permissive. The written testimony includes draft substitute language for your consideration.

Sections two and four of the bill are a little problematic for our office. The requirement to publish the big list either in the radio, TV,

newspapers or etcetera will be costly and inefficient. While sections one and three of the bill allow for the office to be more efficient, these sections would neutralize any savings achieved through those new efficiencies. The requirement to notify municipalities by first class mail every time it appears that a property for a municipality is filed with the state, in section four, will also be costly and inefficient. We respectfully request the committee consider the draft substitute language that was included in the written testimony for section four of the bill.

The Connecticut residents deserve an efficient and accessible method to claim their property with our office and place it back into their own pockets. We urge the committee to JFS this bill with the changes included in the written testimony.

And I would also, if afforded the opportunity to, address a point that Mr. Lizzi had made earlier during his testimony. Utilizing -- he was talking about utilizing other state agency data against the unclaimed property database and automatically sending checks out rightful owners if there was a match.

There are several states that are doing this; however, I've been in communication with those states, because again, we're waiting for a new computer system to come and we're looking at different efficiencies, and approximately twenty-five percent of those checks are returned as undeliverable. So, Treasurer Wooden is very interested in returning more money to more citizens, but in the most efficient and effective manner.

With that, I thank you, and I'll answer any questions.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Thank you. Thank you for your testimony. Are there any questions from members of the committee? Representative France.

REP. FRANCE (42ND): Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you for your testimony and the ongoing conversations we've had. One of the things that we've talked about in our conversations is the -- as you're returning money to the municipal owners or municipalities, and I think the conversation related to dealing with the individual, the youth league, or the fire fighters or whatever.

And we've had a conversation about the Treasurer's Office dealing with the treasurer of the town, who has a similar fiduciary responsibility that your office does. And I think we're -- I've talked about what suggested language as opposed to having you have to deal with potentially thousands of individual groups or dealing with 169 treasurers instead. Have you thought about that and what suggested language might -- and where they might go?

MS. GREENSLADE: Yes. We'd like to deal with the treasurers of each of the municipalities. We think that would be a good focus point. And I believe in our language it says that the treasurer may notify municipalities at least annually of the process of claiming property [INAUDIBLE-02:57:06] to the state. So, we would entertain sending that notification to the treasurers of each of the municipalities, which would streamline the process.

REP. FRANCE (42ND): All right. Thank you very much. Thank you, Madam Chair.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Thank you, Representative. Are there any other questions from members of the committee? Seeing none. Thank you again for your testimony.

MS. GREENSLADE: Thank you.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Next is Emily O'Hara and Noah Frank, followed by Tanya Hughes, followed by Judy Lhamon.

MR. FRANK: Hi. I just wanted to say Emily is not gonna be here. She had to go back to UConn for an event. So, good morning. My name is Noah Frank. Thank you so much, Madam Chair and Mr. Chair for having us, as well as to the Vice-Chairs and Ranking Members. My name is Noah Frank. I'm a sophomore pursuing an undergraduate degree at the University of Connecticut in Storrs as well as a current intern with the Secretary of State Merrill. I come before you today as both a representative of undergraduate students at Connecticut's flagship university. I'm associated with the New Voters Project, UCONNPIRG, as well as to share passionate support for Senate Bill 233.

So, a little about me. I grew up not far from Hartford, just across the river in the beautiful town of South Windsor, Connecticut. At the age of sixteen, my registrars, one of which is right here, Sue Larsen, gave me an opportunity that changed the course of my young life. I was invited to work voter sign-in for a municipal referendum in the spring of 2017. Although it may not sound like much, it was my first introduction into Connecticut's democratic process, and I was very inspired. I'm proud to come -- I am proud to come

before you today, three years later, as an officially certified moderator.

By national standards, Connecticut has a unique number of avenues offering registration to future voters. Since the ratification of Public Act 12-56, Connecticut joins twenty-one other states plus D.C. in offering election day registration. According to a 2010 University of Wisconsin study, most election analysts agree that EDR has the potential to increase turnout in elections from anywhere from anywhere from three percent to six percent. The continued success of Connecticut's EDR system in recent years is a testament to the hard work and cooperation by both the secretary of the state and this body.

However, S.B. 233 addresses important key points where the system is in need of update. According to current state statute, registrars may only designate a single location to service EDR within a municipality. I was a college freshman during the November 2018 -- during the November 2018 elections, where EDR lines at Mansfield Town Hall numbered in the hundreds, causing system shutdowns and long lines. Since that time, registration in Mansfield alone has increased to over 16,000 voters as of last year, suggesting that the turnout for 2020 is going to be significant.

So, Senate Bill 233 empowers these communities to establish additional locations in servicing the consistently rising demand, and creating opportunities to make lifetime voters. Many students my age also were able to register to vote at their local DMV through the 2016 memorandum of understanding with the secretary of the state. The

Brennan Center reports that eleven states plus D.C. have already surpassed Connecticut in implementing full-scale automatic voter registration. Senate Bill 233 seeks to bring our state up to speed in expanding AVR through a sophisticated web of state agencies, reaching many more voters. On top of this, AVR's reliance on continually updated information would guarantee the efficient organization of our voter rolls.

Connecticut's institutions are only as strong as the amount of people who participate. In 2019, over 85,000 citizens became registered voters, making the impact of these avenues clear. The results of conversations had in this room have motivated me to continue working in this field in the future. And if passed, Senate Bill 233 will go down in history as one of Connecticut's most inclusive measures in getting our citizens involved in our shared goals. So, I'm humbled to be speaking before you today and thank you for your time. A vote in favor of Senate Bill 233 is a vote investing in the future of Connecticut's elections.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Thank you. Thank you for your testimony. Are there questions from members of the committee? Seeing none. Thank you very much for your testimony.

MR. FRANK: Thank you.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Next is Tanya Hughes, who will be followed by Judy Lhamon, followed by Alex Tsarkov.

MS HUGHES: Good afternoon Senator Flexer, Representative Fox, Senator Sampson, Representative France and members of the Government Administration

and Elections Committee. My name is Tanya Hughes and I'm here representing the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities, and we thank you for the opportunity to provide testify today. With me is Deputy Director Attorney Cheryl Sharp. And we are here to provide strong support for Senate Bill 238, AN ACT CONCERNING A DISPARITY STUDY.

We've been before the legislature a number of times and the last few years in support of a disparity study, and we believe that a study would supplement the work that we do at CHRO, because it would determine the availability pool of small business contractors in the State of Connecticut. As you know, we currently seek to set aside twenty-five percent of state contracting for small business enterprises and then 6.2 percent -- 6.25 percent for businesses owned by women, ethnic minorities and individual with disabilities.

And so we believe that it would assist CHRO with our enforcement of the state's anti-discrimination contract compliance laws. We believe that the set asides need to be well grounded in evidence and that the disparity study will provide us with the evidence that we need. And I'll defer the remainder of my time to Deputy Director Sharp, who can provide you some more details.

MS. SHARP: So, traditionally and historically -- Cheryl Sharp, deputy director of CHRO. Traditionally and historically, disparity studies are conducted every five years. In the State of Connecticut, we have not conducted one since, I think, it was 1992 was the last disparity study. So, well over thirty years ago, approaching forty. The reason why disparity studies are important is

because in terms of minority business enterprises, which are women-owned businesses, ethnic minority-owned businesses and disabled-owned businesses, it provides an opportunity for equity and equality in the marketplace.

Every year, the State of Connecticut spends hundreds of millions of dollars on public works contracts, funding construction. municipalities, state agencies, they provide this money to contractors for this work to get done. And what the disparity study will show is us as a state is are there qualified minority businesses available to perform this work. Are they getting their fair share of the opportunity to share in this contracting? That is what the disparity study does.

The reason why it's critical that the commission be intimately involved with this process from beginning to end is because we are the state agency responsible for the enforcement of the contract compliance laws that relate to whether or not there is equity in the system. The Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities has come before this committee and other committees, really, begging for this disparity study to be done. It needs to be a study that can withstand judicial scrutiny, so therefore, it needs to be thoughtful; it needs to be thorough. And so we strongly are in support of this very important bill.

Small businesses also benefit from the set-aside program and the commission oversees this program, where we are looking at whether or not we have set aside -- it's not a quota system, but the appropriate amount of state dollars for our own businesses in the State of Connecticut so that they

can grow. So, it is really an economic issue. It is an equity, equality and fairness issue for the commission. I think we're under our three minutes, hopefully.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Actually, I think the rules don't speak to that when you're still on the public official list, so.

MS. SHARP: Oh, okay. All right.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): I appreciate your desire to be concise.

MS. SHARP: Thank you.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Are there questions from members of the committee? Representative Mastrofrancesco.

REP. MASTROFRANCESCO (80TH): Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you very much for your testimony. Just a quick question, just for clarification so I'm understanding. Would you not get some of that data based on who was applying for work for the state, the women in business and that area there?

MS. SHARP: The program is not only related to the state business, but it also deals with contractors who are building schools, for municipalities. It's not just related to state agencies. So, some of the data that needs to be collected will come from state agencies, of course, but other data has to come through looking at records that are maintained by CHRO, records that are maintained by DAS, records that are maintained by other state agencies, looking at different datasets and looking at who is qualified, what businesses are out there, whether the percentage of business that are out there that

are qualified to perform this work, how much are they actually getting, what -- who are the subcontractors, who are the contractors, who are the GMs and the GCs.

So, it's a very complex study that needs to be conducted and it's not something that is within necessarily the wheelhouse of CHRO to conduct the study, which is why it's something that we have to contract with another -- a national firm that has that expertise or what this bill suggest, is the Central Connecticut State University and IMRP, because they have done a similar study on a much smaller scale in looking at racial profiling data throughout the State of Connecticut. So, it really is a comprehensive study that requires pulling datasets from many different sources and analyzing whether there is an underutilization of a race, sex category. And so it's very comprehensive. And data does not lie in one place.

REP. MASTROFRANCESCO (80TH): So, it's just the data that you're looking for. And then, obviously, once that data comes back, it will be something to follow up on to --

MS. SHARP: So, we need the data and we need an analysis and then we need a report. We need to establish whether or not there's an underutilization and then percentages get set from there. Because if there's an underutilization, like right -- let's say there are 150 women-owned construction companies that they do, you know, drywall, but they're not getting any percentage of the work, why is that underutilization happening. Maybe because historically people don't think that women-owned businesses should be doing drywall, so they're

denying them that opportunity. But the data will show us that.

REP. MASTROFRANCESCO (80TH): Right. Would it also -- the data also show you who applied? Because sometimes people don't -- are just not applying to do the work.

MS. SHARP: Yeah. So, if the study is -- it should have components of data collection as well as anecdotal information that they should, as a part of the study, be holding, like, town hall meetings to find out from contractors whether they've applied or not. In some of that information that you're referring to is, like, who actually bid the jobs and who was actually awarded the job. Some of that information would be housed with CHRO; some of it would be at DAS. And it's that culmination of all that data and the analyzation that we need.

REP. MASTROFRANCESCO (80TH): Okay. Thank you for clarification. I appreciate your testimony and for coming out today. It's been a long day for you I'm sure. Thank you.

MS. SHARP: Thank you.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Thank you, Representative. Are there other questions from members of the committee? Well, I just want to say thank you for your work on this. This is an issue that this committee has been looking at for several years and I'm really grateful to your agency and to the both of you for coming with this solution that may potentially give us the opportunity to move forward on something meaningful on this issue instead of just talking about it every year. So, thank you very much.

MS. SHARP: Thank you.

MS. HUGHES: We're willing to provide any additional support you need, so.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Thank you very much. We greatly appreciate that. Next is Judy Lhamon, followed by Alex Tsarkov, followed by Sergio Candelorio. If you don't mind, just push the little gray button in front of you so the red light comes on. There we go. And I hope I've been pronouncing your name correctly.

MS. LHAMON: You have.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Good.

MS. LHAMON: Congratulations. Good afternoon everyone. Honorable members of the committee, I am Judy Lhamon, vice president for Public Issues and Advocacy of the League of Women Voters of Connecticut. I've lived in Connecticut for thirty-six years, the last thirty-four in Hamden. And when I moved to Connecticut, the first time I was able -- it was the first time I was able to vote a full ballot, because previously I had lived in Washington, D.C., where you can only vote for mayor and city council, but no senators or representatives. So, voting issues are particularly dear to my heart.

I want to thank you for bringing forward important legislation to potentially advance our goals of being committed to effective public policy, the active involvement of citizens in their government, and improving the electoral process. I'm going to speak just to three of the bills that you are considering, the early voting, absentee ballot, and a section of the S.B 2-- S.J. 233.

So, I did move to Connecticut from D.C. and it's still true that D.C. residents still can't vote for senators or representatives to congress, but they do have early voting privileges. And I'm concerned that there a lot of people who might want to move to Connecticut or have moved to Connecticut who might be quite surprised that they don't have early voting privileges, early voting, in-person privileges here, since thirty-nine other states do have those privileges.

A retired friend, registrar of voter, has told me that before the presidential election of 2016, her office received far more calls about early voting, like, where is the early voting locations, than calls about polling places, voter registration or candidates. And that when she had to tell them that Connecticut did not offer this voter-friendly option, they were quite surprised and upset. And so we urge you to move this forward in this session.

In terms of absentee -- the absentee ballot bill, H.B. 5278, we think this merits a great deal of support and it will clarify the situation so that people who vote by absentee ballot are neither disenfranchised, nor technically breaking the law. Because theoretically, a voter who commutes by train, who needs to 6:20 train to New York City, and can't return until after 8 p.m. and votes by absentee ballot now, they are technically breaking the current law, since they are in the state at 6 a.m. on election day when the polls are opened. So, this seems like a very well-needed law.

The third thing I want to --

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): If you wouldn't mind summarizing.

MS. LHAMON: Excuse me?

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): If you wouldn't mind summarizing, we'd appreciate that. Thank you.

MS. LHAMON: All right. Yes. All right. The other one I want to mention is the section of S.J. 233, about protecting -- about getting felons who have -- who are on parole to be able to vote regardless of whether their fines and fees are paid or unpaid. The health of our democracy depends on engaged citizens and we should all be about rewarding that desire to engage as active voters. Thank you for your time.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Thank you for your -- thank you and thank you for your testimony. Are there questions from members of the committee? Seeing none. Thank you again for your testimony. Next is Alex Tsarkov, followed by Sergio Candelorio, followed by Sarah Russell. Okay. No Sarah. Then -- then after Sergio will be Representative Steinberg.

MR. TSARKOV: Good afternoon Senator Flexer, Representative Fox, Senator Sampson, Representative France and members of the committee. For the record, my name is Alex Tsarkov and I am the executive director of the Connecticut Sentencing Commission. With me is Sarah Russell, a law professor at the Quinnipiac University School of Law and member of the Sentencing Commission. We are here to testify in favor of section three of Senate Bill 233, AN ACT CONCERNING ELECTIONS, which would restore the electoral privileges to people on parole.

To give you some brief background, the Sentencing Commission is a state criminal justice agency. Our membership of twenty-three includes four judges, the chief state's attorney, the chief public defender, the victim advocate, Commission of Correction, the chair of Board of Pardons and Paroles, as well as community activists interested in the criminal justice system. We have adopted a policy of striving for consensus in our recommendations to the General Assembly. And with that, I'll turn it over to Professor Russell.

PROFESSOR RUSSELL: So, the Sentencing Commission voted several years ago to adopt a proposal that would restore electoral privileges to people on parole, and section three of S.B. 233 would accomplish that goal. Under current Connecticut law, individuals convicted of felonies may not vote until their release from confinement and discharge from parole.

By denying parolees the right to vote, Connecticut stands out among states in the Northeast. In Maine and Vermont, citizens never lose their right to vote, even while incarcerated. In Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Rhode Island, individuals have their right restored automatically when released from incarceration. And in New York, the governor issued an executive order in 2018, removing the restriction on voting for parolees. So, in the entire Northeast, we are the only state that disenfranchises people on parole.

Current law in Connecticut generates confusion because those on probation can vote, whereas those on parole can not. So, many with criminal convictions are unsure of their voting rights and

are nervous about voting because they don't want to get in trouble. There is confusion about whether special parole -- people on special parole can vote. Special parole is something that's different than parole. It's imposed by judges in some cases as part of a portion of the sentence that follows discharge from incarceration and the end of regular parole. So, under current law, it may -- it appears to be that people on special parole can vote, but it's the language of the statute is confusing and in no doubt generates confusion for people with convictions.

There's also a confusion about voting rights for those serving terms of federal supervised release, which is a period of supervision that follows incarceration in the federal system. And so I've people serving those terms who have heard conflicting information about whether they are permitted to vote.

So, S.B. 33 would help eliminate confusion about voting rights for those with criminal convictions. We do recommend that the bill be amended to be clear that those released to halfway houses regain their voting rights. It's simplest if there's a clear line that when someone is released from prison and able to go to a voting place that they're -- that their rights are restored. And that's how the issue is treated in neighboring states. So, the day you're released from prison into the community, your voting rights would be restored. In the version of the bill that passed through the House last year had that language clarified in a helpful way, I think to make really clear where the line is, because I think that clarity will help maximize the number of people

who are able -- who are eligible to vote, actually do vote.

Individuals are more successful at reintegrating into society when they are engaged in the community and the right to participate in the democratic process is central to engaging -- to fostering this engagement. So section three of S.B. 33, if passed, would support this reintegration and clarify the law with respect to voting rights. And we thank the committee for raising this legislation.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you. Is there any questions from the committee? I have a few, if I can. Alex, one question to you, and I guess to you, Professor Russell, as well. When did the commission first address this issue? How long ago? Do you recall?

MR. TSARKOV: I think we took a vote on this about two years ago. And as I recall, it was a unanimous vote. Which is most of our recommendations that we bring here are unanimous.

REP. FOX (148TH): And any idea how many individuals this -- let's say this proceeds through the process and becomes law, any idea how many individuals would be impacted by this at a statewide level?

PROFESSOR RUSSELL: Yes. I believe there are about 3,500 people on parole and special parole. And as I said, there's this confusion about whether those are treated differently. So, I think about 3,500.

REP. FOX (148TH): Right.

PROFESSOR RUSSELL: With the clarification on the halfway houses as well.

REP. FOX (148TH): Yes.

PROFESSOR RUSSELL: That would be another status. That group's under a thousand. I don't have the precise number.

REP. FOX (148TH): Okay. In terms of the actual bill, section three, subsection a, which I think discusses two aspects, and one clarifies discharge and release and also clarifies the portion addressing the payment of all fines. How do other states deal with that? Do they do both fines and discharge or do other states make a difference between those? Because I guess some of the states maintain the difference everything. I look at two parts, the discharge and fine issue. How do other states deal with that? Do they just --

PROFESSOR RUSSELL: Yes. So, I think Connecticut this oddity right now, which is that the fine payment is just in a provision that relates to people who have been incarcerated in federal facilities or facilities in other states. It doesn't apply to people incarcerated in Connecticut facilities. And I believe it was -- it may have just been sort of a mistake that was left over from when the fine requirement was taken out in 2001. But states that require a payment of fines before people are re-enfranchised have been subject to litigation and attack on many grounds around the country. So, it certainly is time for Connecticut to move that provision out, and certainly none of our neighboring states have provisions like that. So, the bill, wisely, I think proposes to take that piece out.

REP. FOX (148TH): And procedurally, in terms of where individuals -- if they are released and they are given the right to vote, where they are able to

vote would be where they were located -- the domicile prior to being incarcerated?

PROFESSOR RUSSELL: So, it's -- if people are released from prison, they can register to vote in their -- in wherever their new town or location is. I think there are different rules that apply if -- there are people currently incarcerated, about a third of the DOC population actually has the right to vote and they're incarcerated either for misdemeanors or pretrial. Those people retain the right to vote, but they don't vote in the location where the prison is. They vote in the town they lived prior to their incarceration, and that's done via absentee ballot.

REP. FOX (148TH): Right. Now, you mentioned two states that have allowed inmates to vote. That's Maine and Vermont, you said?

PROFESSOR RUSSELL: That's correct.

REP. FOX (148TH): How does that process work?

PROFESSOR RUSSELL: So, in Maine and Vermont, people are never disenfranchised as a result of felony convictions. So they don't -- they don't have felony disenfranchisement in Maine and Vermont. So people who are incarcerated, whether for felonies or not, are able to vote. They do it via absentee ballot. And so they register and can vote via absentee ballot in the towns that they lived in before they were incarcerated. And the process is done through the mail.

The town clerk is contacted. The prisoner can contact the town clerk by mail. They get the absentee ballot mailed to them in the prison. They fill it out and they send it back in. So the

process is actually the same as we do here in Connecticut for people who are in for misdemeanors or in pretrial. And they take advantage of volunteers from the League of Women Voters or the NAACP, and those folks come in to help with education and information about the process.

REP. FOX (148TH): Okay. And Professor, you also gave us information how Connecticut's the only state in the Northeast that does not permit this now. In terms of timeframes, when did other states enact this legislation in the Northeast?

PROFESSOR RUSSELL: So, good question. So, as I said, Maine and Vermont have never had the felony disenfranchisement. I believe --so, the most recent to act was New Jersey, which was just this past fall. They re-enfranchised people on parole and probation in New Jersey. In 2018 is when New York re-enfranchised people on parole. And then the other states go further back. So, I believe Rhode Island did it in 2006, and I'm not positive for Massachusetts and New Hampshire, but it was further back than that, I believe.

REP. FOX (148TH): And generally, those states, similar processes to Connecticut's in terms of what they kind of ratcheted back in a sense, like, it was probation and then -- was the situation similar that they made revisions to as Connecticut or no?

PROFESSOR RUSSELL: Sure. Yeah. So, I think in New Jersey, they -- their legislation, they -- people were disenfranchised on probation as well in New Jersey. So, that legislation just covered both. But, yeah, I will say that our neighboring states are clearer, I think, on sort of the day of release, if you can make it to a polling place then you can

vote. And so I think that clear line really just helps people who have -- do have this right, know that they can exercise it.

REP. FOX (148TH): And in making that statement, do you -- would you advocate for more clear language in the current proposed bill?

PROFESSOR RUSSELL: I would. I would. And I think the language that was in House Bill 7160 with respect to it, essentially just eliminating this language that says release from confinement in a correctional institution or facility, or a community residence. If that "or a community residence" comes out of the bill in a few places, I think it will clarify the language. And yeah, you can look to House Bill 7160 for how that was done last year.

REP. FOX (148TH): Okay. Thank you very much. Any further questions or comments? Senator Haskell.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Just one and it's sort of adjacent. Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's sort of adjacent to the bill. But you mentioned that about a third of the folks who are currently incarcerated still have their right to vote and you think that's around 4,000 individuals. Do they have the opportunity to do so? Have you seen that within the DOC at places like North Avenue in Bridgeport, where many of the folks who are incarcerated there have not yet been sentenced? I shouldn't say yet. Have not been sentenced? Do you -- what do voter participation rates look like?

PROFESSOR RUSSELL: So, that's a great question and actually Alex Tsarkov here helped organize a working group of the Sentencing Commission that met several times over the past year to talk about this issue,

along with representatives from the Registrars of Voters Association, the Town Clerks Association, Unlock the Vote, ACLU, New Haven Legal Assistance and the Department of Corrections, to really look at this issue about access to voting for that population. And so the group did go out to York Correctional, the women's facility, and did several workshops related -- to help people register and then also to provide absentee ballot applications.

And so I think having that done on a wider scale would make sense, because I think many people are not aware of their rights and I think there can be improvement to sort of access to voting. So, this group, I think, will be continuing to meet and they come up with some recommendations that may be things that could be handled on an administrative level. But it's possible the group will work to return with some legislative recommendations.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Thank you. Looking forward to seeing those recommendations. Thanks for your work. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

REP. FOX (148TH): Any further questions or comments? Thank you for your time and testimony today. I appreciate you being here.

PROFESSOR RUSSELL: Thank you. Next, I have Sergio Candelorio, followed by Representative Steinberg. Thank you. Lourdes Fonseca, Fonseca. Is Lourdes here? I see Representative Steinberg is here. Would he step forward? Followed by Odette White Eagle, followed by Sylvester Edwards.

REP. STEINBERG (136TH): Good afternoon esteemed Chairs and members of the GAE committee. It's nice to be back before you. Frankly, you have so many

good bills today; we'd need much more than three minutes to compliment you on all of them. But instead I will cede my time to one of Westport's registrar of voters, Marla Cowden, who wants to come and I believe on Senate Bills 239 and 243. Marla?

MS. COWDEN: Good afternoon Chairman Fox and members of the committee. My name is Marla Cowden, and I have submitted written testimony. And basically most of what I have to talk to you about today is efficiency in government. The -- I was a member of the original Election Day Registration Implementation Committee for the Secretary of the State's Office. At that time, that long ago, we discussed the idea of automating election day registration.

We were then -- we were told at that time that because it needed to be -- it was May, and it needed to be implemented by November, that we were unable to use automation and that they would revisit it. Here we are, five years later, it is -- the part that we currently have now is eminently automatable. I do agree with the secretary that I think we should eliminate the confirmation process for election day registration in total. In the event that that not happen, I would ask that we automate it.

With regard to 39, Senate Bill 239, which concerns the auditing of signed statements of electors prior to voting, that requires that that has a reporting component to it. The explanation needs to provide the necessity, both the necessity and the use of this data. Under the proposed legislation, neither are explained in the submission of this bill. In the event that the committee is convinced of the necessity of such collection, the secretary of state

conduct a pilot program to begin collecting such data and analyze whether the results should really be rolled out statewide.

If such a pilot project indicates the need for such collection and the committee sees fit to move it forward, I respectfully request, as I have submitted, that in -- that there be made accommodations for automating the process. The current Connecticut voter registration system could easily accommodate this automation.

With respect to S.B. 233, this requires the reporting of information, again, which is required -- which the secretary of the state will be requiring. And I would ask that inform -- that the -- that wording be inserted to, again, require automation, which is easily doable under the election night -- election management reporting system that we currently have. Thank you very much.

REP. STEINBERG (136TH): I realized I was remiss in not identifying myself at the outset. I'm State Representative Jonathan Steinberg from the 136th District.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you very much. Any questions or comments? Senator Haskell.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): I just wanted to thank you both for being here today. Westport's a long way. I know, because I'll be doing that drive later today. I just wanted to briefly ask you, Marla. Very often when I meet with registrars in my district, they're sort of opposed to substantial changes, increased automatic, increased use of technology. But the perspective that you bring today is quite different. And I just wanted to sort

of give you an opportunity to sort of explain where you might differ from other registrars in terms of greater automation, generally speaking.

MS. COWDEN: I think the reticence for greater automation is a false flag. I think that registrars in general love when we're given the opportunity to be the beneficiaries of automation. The Technology Committee, which I'm a member of, for the Registrar of Voters Association, recently worked with members of the Secretary of the State's Office to do some automation and -- and we continue to work with trying to get the office to recognize and move forward with such automation. I do not believe that registrars are any more opposed to automation than they are opposed to non-automated additional processes which are given to their office.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Thank you very much. And thank you both for your service to our community. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you. Any further questions or comments? I have one question, if I may. Being part of the commission that kind of was the birthplace of EDR, any thoughts from a state perspective as to what went right or what went wrong, or if you knew now what you knew back then?

MS. COWDEN: We were given a mandate to implement. We were not given an opportunity to stray, if you will. I would say, again, if you look at -- as has been testified, if you look at the states who do election day registration, we are the only one who requires confirmation ahead of time. Election day registration, for example, in Wisconsin, has been being done since the 1970s. They do none of this.

REP. FOX (148TH): In terms of the bill, there's a component of it that would ask registrars, in terms of the EDR, to submit a report to the secretary of state ahead of time. Is that something you would find relatively easy enough to do?

MS. COWDEN: I find it easy to do. I find it easier to automate. You know, paper -- tracking things is expensive. Collecting data is expensive. Collection it manually is even more expensive. When you think of 169 towns, collecting the same information and doing it paper-wise and doing it by checking a box on the system, you know, efficiency in government says we really need to be going there.

REP. FOX (148TH): In terms of EDR, how many would your town have had in the last election, 2016, 2018, a ballpark?

MS. COWDEN: One-hundred and seventy-two.

REP. FOX (148TH): In '18?

MS. COWDEN: In 2016. I'm sorry.

REP. FOX (148TH): (In) 2016. Okay.

MS. COWDEN: In the last presidential.

REP. FOX (148TH): Would you anticipate your town applying for a second location or is one sufficient, from your perspective?

MS. COWDEN: One was sufficient in 2016. We will certainly track. It depends greatly upon what this election is going to be looking like. We will certainly track what is happening to our voting population in Westport and if we deem that it is necessary to open up a second location -- actually, we would be more likely to open up another line at

our EDR location than we would be to open up another location.

REP. FOX (148TH): And currently it's held in your town hall?

MS. COWDEN: In town hall, yeah.

REP. FOX (148TH): Mm-hmm. All right. Thank you very much for your testimony today. Any further questions or comments? Thank you very much. Thank you, Representative. Next up, Odette White Eagle. I will say for the committee's notice that Sergio Candelorio and Lourdes Fonseca, who were not here, have submitted written testimony for the committee to review if they so choose. Odette's followed by Sylvester Edwards, followed by Timothy DeCarlo. Good afternoon, ma'am.

MS. WHITE EAGLE: Hello. Good afternoon members of the Government Administration and Election Committee. My name is Odette White Eagle and I'm a member of Katal Center for Health, Equity, and Justice. I support the bill S.B. 233. I'm also a second year MSW student at the UConn School of Social Work. I thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of S.B. 233, AN ACT CONCERNING ELECTIONS. The reason that I am in support of this bill is because I think that all citizens have the right to vote regardless whether or not they have been convicted or -- convicted of committing a crime.

Due to the fact that Connecticut has high incarceration rates, there are thousands of people in prison and on parole currently do not have -- currently are not allowed to vote in the state. No matter what your views on these people are or people

that have been convicted, they are still citizens and they still should have a say in the matters regarding themselves or their community. In addition, the law currently states that people on parole do not -- who have not paid their fines are not allowed to vote until they are paid in full. This disproportionately affects poor people who cannot afford to pay their fines quickly. Not only is this unfair, but it further disenfranchises this group of people by taking away their right to vote, which is essentially punishing them for being poor.

Furthermore, getting rid of unnecessary barriers for people to vote is essential in making sure that everyone is represented in elections. Voting should be made as easy as possible in order for people -- in order to reduce voter suppression. And automatic voter registration is a great way increase voter participation and has had huge success in other parts of the country. In conclusion, I support S.B. 233. I think equality is for everyone. And thank you for your time.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you very much. Any questions or comments? A quick question. Can you tell me a little bit about the Katal Center and what it is you do there?

MS. WHITE EAGLE: I'm a member. I go to meetings. I'm an active participant in it.

REP. FOX (148TH): But what is the general purpose?

MS. WHITE EAGLE: The general purpose is just to come to meetings. Well, for me, anyways, would be to come to meetings and testify on what I think is appropriate for me to - like, some things that I agree with. I'm currently in the School of Social

Work, so I'm not fulltime in Katal Center. I usually just hear about those that I think are important to me and I come in and testify.

REP. FOX (148TH): Is voting rights an issue that they often pursue?

MS. WHITE EAGLE: Yes, it is.

REP. FOX (148TH): It is. Okay. And that's the one that obviously intrigued your interest?

MS. WHITE EAGLE: Voting rights, yes.

REP. FOX (148TH): Okay. How's school going?

MS. WHITE EAGLE: Excuse me?

REP. FOX (148TH): How is school going?

MS. WHITE EAGLE: Oh, I'm almost done, two more months.

REP. FOX (148TH): Oh, very nice. Well, good luck to you.

MS. WHITE EAGLE: Thank you.

REP. FOX (148TH): Congratulations. Any further questions or comments? Thank you for your time today. I appreciate you being here.

MS. WHITE EAGLE: Can I just add one thing?

REP. FOX (148TH): Sure.

MS. WHITE EAGLE: I did hear somebody in prior testimony talking about the language as far as the restoration of the rights as far as being -- the fines being paid. So, I actually looked it up in the General Connecticut Statutes, and it's very vague as to who needs to pay these fines or not, because it's included in it -- it says anybody

that's federal or other state correctional facilities, and then fines are in that. So, it's not very clear as to who needs to pay these bills, so.

REP. FOX (148TH): Okay. Thank you very much. I appreciate that.

MS. WHITE EAGLE: All right. Thank you.

REP. FOX (148TH): Have a nice day.

MS. WHITE EAGLE: All right. Thank you for your time.

REP. FOX (148TH): Next, Sylvester Edwards, followed by Timothy DeCarlo, followed by Jaylyn Perry. Is Mr. Edwards here? Mr. DeCarlo, followed by Jaylyn Perry, followed by Kelsey Hust. Good afternoon Mr. DeCarlo.

MR. DECARLO: Good afternoon Chairman Fox, Ranking Member France, and members of the GAE Committee. My name is Timothy De Carlo. I'm the registrar of voters in the city of Waterbury, the chair of the New Haven County ROVAC Association and the chairman of ROVAC Legislative Committee. And I'm here to testify today in regards to the Senate Bill 233, and mainly focusing on the election day registration aspect of bill. I have submitted written testimony, so I will summarize, as this is an issue that I have come before this committee multiple times.

ROVAC is very appreciative of the committee with raising this concept and this bill, allowing for a municipality to opt in to if they would like to have an additional EDR location, also to put the staffing require -- what staffing levels they have on file with the Secretary of State's Office. That is

something that we do support and we think that that's something that could help to alleviate any sort of lines. Every year, when we do election day registration, it depends on the style of election, not -- so, what I mean, municipal, state, federal, it's not necessarily you'd need the same staff.

In Waterbury, for instance, in 2016, we hired twenty-seven people. In 2018, we hired seventeen people. In 2019, I hired six people. And it varies between a presidential, 954 registrations for election day registration, down to about fifty for a municipal. So, it always depends and it gives the city the ability to make adjustments. One thing the bill does not do and that is it does extend election day registration past 8 o'clock, treating the EDR location like a polling place. One thing that we do want to raise is it does adjust the timeframe in which reporting will go back to the state.

As we've seen in high-profile elections, presidentials generally, you usually have a great amount of people turning out that are there to register. Should those citizens continue to be processed and made electors that were in line at 8 o'clock, it has the potential of delaying the time in which the results are gonna come in to central counting, be processed and sent to Hartford, also triggering the possibility, especially in multiple town districts, that it could it be several days until the results are actually officially finalized.

And so what we would -- you know, what we suggested in the past is looking at that to adjust the timeframe. Many states have things called election week; Georgia, Alabama, Colorado, where they're counting ballots after the fact. This would have

that consequence in high-turnout elections, municipal more than likely not as much. The other thing that we did notice in the drafting of this legislation is that they attempted to remove the crosscheck in EDR. That removal -- in doing so, they actually removed using the CDRS system, which is how we register voters. So, that is something that we would ask the committee to look at because as drafted right now, we wouldn't actually even have our system to register people. At that point, I will -- I'll wrap up.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you for your testimony. Any questions or comments? Representative France.

REP. FRANCE (42ND): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Welcome and appreciate your testimony. I'll ask you the same question that I asked the secretary of state. So, as we're expanding automatic voter registration opportunities and EDR beyond 8 o'clock, potentially, in the intersection of those two systems, when somebody who has already been registered AVR and maybe have forgotten and then shows up at the EDR line. Now, we're after 8 o'clock, polls are closed, but they're already registered to vote. And my understanding at that point, they're turned away and they cannot vote.

MR. DECARLO: Correct.

REP. FRANCE (42ND): What would you suggest as a potential solution or process that could alleviate that particular conflict?

MR. DECARLO: Well, the secretary had said in her testimony, and we agree, with line management is really the way to fix election day registration when it comes down to it. There was a task force that

the secretary had put together back in 2012 that addressed the implementation of election day registration. And that might be something that we could bring back. I sat on that task force to try to figure out how to bring it together. You are correct.

There -- give you a perfect example. In 2016, we registered 954 people in Waterbury and we estimate that we sent out about 1,200 voters, back out of EDR and directly to the polls. The way we do that in Waterbury is the minute you walk into our EDR location, we do a local search for you in the centralized voter registration system, the CVR system. If you show up active or inactive, you have got to go to your poll to cast your ballot. So, we -- we do a triage right off the bat and that's something that we've done. And, you know, I can say -- election day registration started in 2013 in the State of Connecticut. I was the registrar then. We have never had a person in line at 8 o'clock. We have every -- since 2013, we have processed everyone with no line at the end.

REP. FRANCE (42ND): And so, given that triage that you do, is that something that ROVAC has recommended to other towns and are you aware of other towns implementing that type of procedure?

MR. DECARLO: Yes. I know the town of Middletown has begun doing that. You know, there are a -- the larger -- if you're a college town or you're a large city, or even a medium-sized city, especially in a presidential, you know, it benefits everything. Because you also don't want to disenfranchise that voter who doesn't know. There's a great amount of voters who sometimes -- a lot of -- I'll be honest,

a lot of voters only vote every four years, and we know that because there's lines when we go into the polls.

So, because of that, sometimes they don't realize that they registered to vote, and so you want to get them out so that they get the right to cast that ballot that day. If the line is bottlenecking and you're not checking until after 10 o'clock at night, when they get to the window to process, that voter is now disenfranchised. They cannot cast that ballot.

REP. FRANCE (42ND): Thank you for that. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you, Representative. Further questions or comments? I have a few, if I may, sir.

MR. DECARLO: Of course.

REP. FOX (148TH): In terms of the-- currently, as the bill is drafted, the registrars are tasked the municipalities are tasked with notifying the secretary of state within thirty days of their plan. The next window is -- if they want a second date, it is ninety days. The second location is ninety days out. When in terms of planning, when -- how far in advance will you know? I mean, would ninety days be a sufficient window? Would, I mean --

MR. DECARLO: Yeah.

REP. FOX (148TH): So, at around ninety days you'd have an idea of how many staffers you'll need?

MR. DECARLO: Yeah. I mean, generally -- and the whole point of giving that staffing to the Secretary of State's Office is it mirrors the ballot that we

already do, where it says we had X amount of turnout. This is what we did in election day registration locations. This is the staff that we had. And so, again, in a presidential, you're gonna ramp-up, but in a municipal you're not going to -- you're not gonna need that.

And personally, I have not sat down and mapped out exactly what we're gonna do for election day registration in Waterbury this second. But I know we're gonna mirror our 2016 model and I know it's gonna be at least twenty-seven people or more. With this presidential, it could very well be more people that we hire. But, yeah, you would know ahead of time, just by the style of -- the type of election that it is, what you need to get put together to run that operation.

REP. FOX (148TH): In terms of the twenty-seven individuals, what type of training goes into -- you know, these people they probably used in the past, people you know that -- I mean, what's the training in other words required from the municipalities?

MR. DECARLO: It depends. Everyone does things differently. And some towns, as Westport said, they did around a hundred and something for a presidential, where I'm doing over 900. So, what we do is we will -- we bring those folks into our office and have them work for usually the last two to three weeks prior to the election, putting voters on, pulling voters from other towns, when it's a new registration, so that they are familiar with the system. I'm under the federal bilingual mandate, so I have people who are English and Spanish speaking in the area. I have people that their main goal is just to look the voter up as they walk in. So, we

try to reuse the same people, but we do use a lot of -- we do a lot of hands-on training, because the system -- if you don't know how to use the system on the day of the election, then you're not gonna be able to -- you're gonna have problems with the election day registration area.

So, you know -- and when I teach the election day registration classes at the ROVAC conferences, these are the things -- you know, we talk about triaging lines, you know, highly recommending it. We recommend that, you know, you bring the folks in ahead of time so that they're familiar on how to put a voter on, how to pull the voter from the proper town and things of that nature.

REP. FOX (148TH): I've been to the Waterbury Town Hall. where physically do you hold EDR in the Waterbury Town Hall?

MR. DECARLO: I have --

REP. FOX (148TH): When you have twenty-seven people. It's not like it's just two people you can throw in a corner. There's twenty-seven other bodies you've got to put somewhere, you've got a break space for them, you've got to -- I mean, it's a full operation you gotta put in place.

MR. DECARLO: It is. So, our mayor's office and our town clerk have been wonderful partners with us and we actually take the entire first floor of city hall. The Tax Office closes their door and we have -- we take probably -- it's probably almost a 20,000 square foot area, which is why I personally would not need a second location in Waterbury for election day registration, because I -- we -- our town clerk's office has a long line of windows with

computers already set up to them. She -- the town clerk is kind enough to lend her staff to us that day, which always gives us half the numbers right off the bat. And so, we -- it's a huge area, with stations. So, I'll give you an idea.

When you come in either of the three front door -- there's two side doors and a front. Instantly, we do the check. If you show up as a registered voter, active or inactive, we write down where you need to go, the address of the polling place and what needs to be done, because if you're inactive, you need to restore yourself. It's simply just filling out a voter registration card. And we send that voter out with the directions and everything to their new -- to their polling location. If they're not -- if they don't show up at that point, we send them over to fill out a voter registration card, make sure that they are aware that they have the proper identification, which is ID as well as residency tying them to the address that they're claiming. It's different -- it's much stringent for election day registration than it is for regular registration.

At that point, they're filling out their card. They're getting in line and then they're going to the window to be processed in the CVRS. If it turns out now we're doing --

REP. FOX (148TH): That's actually the third point in that they -- so, they've been taken in. They've shown their ID, now they're at the window?

MR. DECARLO: Now, they're at the window to actually process, because we know they're not an elector in the city of Waterbury. So, now it's time to get them registered, get them their ballot, and get them

out. At that point, if they turn out -- if it turns out that they're from another town, say, they're from Stamford, at that point we're going to continue the registration, give them the proper ballot, call the city of Stamford to see if they voted today. If Stamford is fast and tells us right off the bat, yeah, we were able to do it, fine. If not, the ballot is put to the side until 8 o'clock. If we never hear from Stamford, no big deal, the ballot goes upstairs to be processed because we made our two attempts to make sure that that was taken care of.

And at that point, the ballots go to central counting and they're processed.

REP. FOX (148TH): Can you also walk me through the -- it seems like Waterbury's process works and you've got an official process. You've been doing it for a few years. Can you walk me through the -- o'clock, when polls close, EDR? For EDR, what goes on in Waterbury's office?

MR. DECARLO: Well, at 8 o'clock, again, we've never had a line. So, at 8 o'clock, we just -- you know, it rolls 8 o'clock, we shut the door to the EDR location, gather up any of those ballots, if we didn't hear from those towns. And it does happen sometimes, the town doesn't get back to you. Put them in the depository box.

REP. FOX (148TH): You mean the envelope?

MR. DECARLO: Yeah, the EDR -- the envelope with the executed ballots.

REP. FOX (148TH): Sealed.

MR. DECARLO: Yeah. Sealed with the signature of the voter. It goes to the centralized location. We do centralized. Smaller towns, like, I believe, Montville, places like that, they're going to do it in the poll. So, it's treated just like an absentee ballot. At that point, you're gonna --

REP. FOX (148TH): So you do it right there, within your first floor? Yes. That's where you take the ballots at.

MR. DECARLO: Yes. We do -- we count our absentees on the same floor. So, it goes right to the absentee counters, separated, goes through a different tabulator. We have two tabulators for absentees, two tabulators for EDR. And then we -- after we get them, we have to put everything into the centralized voting system -- or excuse me, the end of night reporting system. We have too many acronyms in voting. So, we put that in and then -- there's over 3,000 manual calculations in a presidential or an even-year election in Waterbury. Once all of those are in, the results go up to Hartford and we're all set. So, that's between 8 o'clock and 1 a.m. we're talking.

REP. FOX (148TH): You make reference in your testimony to 9-311 and 9-440, the reporting statute at night. Is it as easy as simply eliminating those statutes or eliminating requirements in those statutes or?

MR. DECARLO: No, I wouldn't eliminate them. But right now, the state law is we have to have our results up to Hartford by midnight. That's the state law. Simple as that. The Secretary of State's Office only has three days to announce a recanvas. And so, it's actually -- if the results

are coming in later, these -- they're going to need to be adjusted. Otherwise, the registrars and the Secretary of State's Office may be in violation of state statutes by not being able to get the results out at that point.

REP. FOX (148TH): So, potentially moving the time periods as opposed to completing it?

MR. DECARLO: It's -- yeah, I mean -- I think that it, you know -- it depends on the size now. The perfect example was last year, because under state law -- or excuse me, 2018. We had a candidate running for General Assembly in Waterbury and the individual won. We knew that that individual had won, but when we put -- when you -- you put your results in the end of night reporting system, you hit send, it goes to Hartford, then you -- then it gives you the final report. You see everything that you put in.

Well, we noticed that somewhere along the line, we made a keying error and that person who won also had 500 extra votes. So, at that point, we had to do an amended return. Sit there, go everything to figure it out. It's just -- it's the process. It's not, you know -- but it takes time to get accurate and honest results. And that's what ROVAC wants, is to get accurate and honest results. Rushing gets sloppy results and then we have issues. We have recount -- recanvases, which are a recount. We don't want to see them announced too late or called off because of a sloppy reporting. That's not what the Registrar Association wants to see, and I know that's not what Secretary Merrill wants to see. We want to be able to give to the citizens of Connecticut accurate results.

REP. FOX (148TH): Okay. Earlier, there was an individual named Luther Weeks who testified and advocated for an additional scanner, I think, he said?

MR. DECARLO: I would -- I stepped out while he was testifying.

REP. FOX (148TH): Okay. Yeah, I think his idea was there be an additional scanner. It would eliminate the crosscheck by having an additional scanner on site and just slip the ballots in right then and there, and we'd eliminate the crosscheck. Is that -
-

MR. DECARLO: The whole thing is -- so --

REP. FOX (148TH): Obviously, there would be a cost involved and things of that nature, so it's --

MR. DECARLO: It's not even -- it's not even the cost. It's really the -- I hear all the time that the crosscheck slows the process down. It doesn't. Because the person that's come to you at that point to register at election day registration is doing exactly that. They're getting their ballot, they're leaving. And it's not -- they're not being -- they're not standing there while we're waiting to hear from the other town. They're being processed and they're done. There have been instances where we have, unfortunately, found folks who tried to vote more than one location -- more than one time.

In 2013, the very first time we had election day registration, it was the towns of Berlin and New Britain, and it was the crosscheck that caught it. Because when the individual walked into the polling place to pass the ballot in Berlin, it was already on the checker's book. I said did you vote already

today? And the person turned around and walked out. They hadn't actually broken state law because at that time -- so Secretary Merrill, the next year, brought out legislation to make that illegal. Unfortunately, that did not pass.

So, it -- the way I look at this, and I don't -- I mean, I have people in front of me who I think kind of get this. Everything that we do these days has kind of gotten a little partisan and a little hot. And if I was to say -- you know, I think, and not, obviously, the four folks in front of me, because you're all, you know, upstanding members of the General Assembly. But I bet if somebody started to say whether or not the taste of bubblegum was good, one side of the room might disagree with the other side. The crosscheck doesn't slow anything down. It doesn't cost anything. But what it does is it allows us to say to the general public, you know what, these folks came in today, they were registered under the town, we checked. When you remove that, you're now allowing for conspiracies.

You're allowed to hear things that, you know, magically, you know -- well, all of these people are just showing up. One of the things that gets under my skin more than anything is that you hear that in Waterbury there are vans that go around, filled with people, voting multiple times. And I've heard that. It drives me -- that or the dead vote. And it drives me insane. None of that's true. But when you start saying things like and removing safeguards, the public starts to get weary and you give folks an argument that the results aren't valid.

And, you know, it's just -- it drives -- you know, I generally don't throw around my party, especially when I'm up here. But I am the republican registrar from the city of Waterbury and, you know, I am the one that executes EDR. I've been given awards from the Secretary of State's Office for it. We believe in it. We believe in fair results. The people -- the individual who wins is the individual who wins. And we are not looking to get into partisan battles, because that's not what the registrars do. And so we want to be able to give -- when we give those correct results, we want them to be considered honest, fair and accurate. And I really think removing that crosscheck, you're allowing folks, sometimes sore losers, to now say the reason I lost is because of all of these people that got bussed around the city of Waterbury today and cast ballots, which isn't true.

It's harder to register at election day registration than it is any other time, because you've got to prove residency. You've got to prove identity. It's harder. And there are people that can't do that. And those people, you know, if they don't have the proper identification, per state law, you know, they are turned away. They're allowed to come back if they can collect it. So, it's just -- it's one thing that I really -- it really sticks to me anyway, personally, as a registrar, that removing that crosscheck, I think, it gives people a chance to question the results, and I don't like that.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you very much. Further questions or comments? I appreciate you being here today, sir. Have a nice day. Thank you for all your efforts.

MR. DECARLO: Thank you.

REP. FOX (148TH): Next, Jaylyn Perry, followed by Kelsey Hust, followed by mark Bernacki. Good afternoon.

MS. PERRY: Good afternoon Chairperson Fox and members of the committee. My name is Jaylyn Perry and I came here today to ask the committee to pass S.B. 233, AN ACT CONCERNING ELECTIONS. I am particularly concerned with the changes being made to section three of the bill regarding parole. I am in agreement with the proposed changes to this section that restores the right to vote for those on parole. I am currently getting my master's degree in social work at UCONN and will be graduating in May.

As a social worker, I believe it is important to advocate for social justice and the dignity and worth of all people, since these are two core values of the social work profession. Making the proposed changes to section three of this bill would be an affirmation of these values. Obviously, it is not only social workers who hold these values, so I urge the members of this committee to show that they believe in social justice and the dignity and worth of all people by voting to pass this bill.

Individuals who have served their prison sentence and are on parole have begun their reentry into society. Therefore, they should no longer be disenfranchised. Being stripped of the core democratic right to vote renders felons second-class citizens. Extending the consequences of a crime beyond a prison sentence is unjust. To achieve social justice and affirm that these individuals have the same dignity and worth of all citizens, the

voting rights of those on parole need to be restored. Through the restoration of voting rights for those on parole, convicted felons receive the message from our state that upon their exit from prison they have the opportunity to start over and exercise their civic duty as law-abiding citizens that positively contribute to society by participating in the democratic process.

If Connecticut residents took a look around, we would notice that we are surrounded by states that have passed legislation to restore the voting rights of those on parole. Connecticut is behind its neighbors on this piece of legislation. Connecticut is the last state in New England to allow the voting rights of parolees to be restored. Please do not wait any longer to take a step towards social justice for residents on parole in Connecticut. I urge you to pass the act concerning elections in order to restore the right the vote for those on parole. Thank you for your time.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you very much. Is there any questions or comments? A question. What are you looking to pursue with your social work degree?

MS. PERRY: I am interested in international social work, so I would like to work for an international nonprofit doing relief and development work.

REP. FOX (148TH): Where does your interest in this issue stem from?

MS. PERRY: What was that?

REP. FOX (148TH): Where does your interest in this issue stem from?

MS. PERRY: The issues that I'm interested in? Is that the question?

REP. FOX (148TH): Yeah. What does your interest in this particular issue stem from? Where is that?

MS. PERRY: Oh, this. Just a social justice perspective, I believe is core and central in social work, so any issue that surrounds that gets me interested.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you very much. Appreciate your time and efforts. Any further questions? Have a nice day. Thank you for coming. Kelsey Hust, followed by Mark Bernacki, followed by Anna Posniak. Good afternoon ma'am.

MS. HUST: Good afternoon. Good afternoon Chairperson Flexer and distinguished members of the committee. My name is Kelsey Hust and I am here to testify in favor of S.B. 233, AN ACT CONCERNING ELECTIONS, particularly section three. As people who have said before, I am also a graduate student at the UConn School of Social Work.

As a soon to be social worker and community organizer, this topic is a social justice matter that is sure to affect people I will be working with during my career or people in their communities. As social workers, we're taught to be advocates and social justice fighters. Social and political action is an ethical responsibility embedded into our code of ethics, and I'm here to live up to my code of ethics and open up voting rights to convicted felons who are on parole without the payment of fines.

Voting rights have been fought for by multiple groups over time, groups who have already faced

oppression and bias, and here we are again, still fighting for a group that continues to face oppression and bias. Not providing voting rights to those who are on parole due to unpaid fines is a form of continuing punishment after someone has been released. I think it is important to take into account the hardship someone may face with lack of access to income after release. The cause of not being able to bring in income to pay fines are not related to their current efforts, but because of something that is part of their past.

By not allowing convicted felons owing fines to vote, we are allowing the oppressive systems to continue to push people down who are already down. By not allowing voting rights to be reinstated for these people affected, we continue to believe that people can pull themselves up by their bootstraps without equity. We are all human. We have all made mistakes, but I am asking that we put a stop to the continuation of punishment when people have done what they need to to be where they are and to create a better life beyond what has happened in their past.

We continue to expect people to jump over unnecessary hurdles. We expect people to continue to prove themselves. We trust people on parole enough to allow them into the community, but not enough to have a say in their community and those who oversee their community, state, and country. I'm asking that you vote in favor of S.B. 233. Thank you.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you very much. Any questions or comments for Ms. Hust? A quick

question and a kind of a broad, general, vague question. Why do you enjoy voting as an individual?

MS. HUST: So, it's empowering and I also believe it's empowering for people that, you know, we are fighting for as social workers or soon to be social workers. To be honest, I didn't care too much about voting until I started my social work career and I really understood how having a say really affects my future and my community as well as others around me.

REP. FOX (148TH): What do you hope to do with your career?

MS. HUST: So, I am -- I do have a concentration in community organizing, but I do enjoy doing direct support as well. But I think I'm gonna go into public health in some form.

REP. FOX (148TH): Well, the best of luck to you. Thank you very much for being here today.

MS. HUST: Thank you.

REP. FOX (148TH): Any further questions or comments? Thank you again for your time. Appreciate you being here.

MS. HUST: Thank you.

REP. FOX (148TH): Next is Mark Bernacki, followed by Anna Posniak, followed by Francesca Villani. Good afternoon.

MS. POSNIAK: Good afternoon. Good afternoon Representative Fox, Representative France and the distinguished members of the GAE Committee. My name is Anna Posniak. I'm the Windsor town clerk and I'm the president of the CTCA. I'm here to speak to

bill 5277, AN ACT DECREASING FEES FOR COPYING OF PUBLIC RECORDS.

On behalf of the CTCA, thank you for exempting land records from this bill and also expanding the definition of a handheld scanner to include cell phones and cameras, as this will allow for uniform observance of the law in each city and town. As you know, the right to own property is one of the greatest freedoms we enjoy as U.S. Citizens, and the public recording of land records is integral to the preservation of this right. Land records are and have always been a permanent record.

Town clerks do not alter the contents of the documents. Our responsibility is to keep and maintain a true and accurate copy of the record. Additionally, these records have always been public records. You're able to search them. You're able to view them, copy them in the Clerk's Office during regular business hours, and in many cities and towns, through the internet as a convenient alternative.

Over the past ten years, town clerks have heavily invested in the modernization of the public land record software system at the cost of our taxpayers in our cities and towns. The goal of these technology projects generally have been to improve - - improve the ease of use and broaden the access of land records for our constituents and the companies that are part of the real estate closing process. The copy and scanner fees collected from individuals, who, in the majority of cases, are for-profit companies, help to defray the technology costs and many other related costs to keeping land

records in perpetuity, and in the end, keeping taxes lower for our residents.

Thank you for this opportunity to present this testimony. I will answer any questions you may have.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you very much, Ms. Posniak. Any questions or comments? Representative Winkler.

REP. WINKLER (56TH): Thank you for your testimony. I'd like to know from -- and this is slightly off topic. But what adjustments has your office had to make, if any, in the efforts to prevent, say, an abused spouse from being located by the husband? Have you had to shield any records, do anything of that sort?

MS. POSNIAK: With land records, they're open -- we cannot redact any information and we have to provide that to the public and we also have to have that on -- if you have the land record indexes on the internet, you have to maintain that, so if someone is doing a title search, so that all the records are there.

REP. WINKLER (56TH): Okay. So, let us say that -- and this is a proposition that has come before people in this building. I'm fine with the land records, but I would like my information taken out of the online databases to make it harder for my abusive spouse to find me. That would be something that would be equally as reprehensible as altering a land record or is that something that could be considered?

MS. POSNIAK: I believe the courts have found that we cannot remove those -- that information from our indexes, even the online indexes. Many title

companies now rely on the online indexes, so we have to have the full documents there so that they can do a proper title search on the land record.

REP. WINKLER (56TH): Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

MS. POSNIAK: You're welcome

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you, Representative. Any further questions or comments? A quick question, if I may. I'm from Stamford. In Stamford, the Town Clerk's Office is two floors. The first floor is the main floor. The second is where the records are, down in the basement. Is there a way of -- in terms of the handheld scanners, I guess it's more or less an honor system we'd be going in?

MS. POSNIAK: I know in the town of Windsor it is an honor system. I can't speak for the other towns on how they would implement that. But, you know, it is an honor system.

REP. FOX (148TH): Are people using handheld scanners now?

MS. POSNIAK: A lot of the title searchers are using cameras -- or, I mean, their cell phones now and they are paying the \$20 dollar fee, a maximum of \$20 dollars.

REP. FOX (148TH): And you're finding through them that they can get clear enough photos with the phones?

MS. POSNIAK: From what I understand, they have an app on their phone, so they're not actually using the camera, and the app is taking a picture, but then it is also cropping out all the information and centering it. And it's actually remarkable, the

scanned image that it creates. It's more of a scanned image than a photo.

REP. FOX (148TH): Right. Gotcha. Okay. Any further questions or comments? Thank you for your time. Appreciate the testimony.

MS. POSNIAK: You're welcome. Thank you very much.

REP. FOX (148TH): Next is Francesca Villani, followed by Morgan Reiss, followed by Beth Rotman. Good afternoon.

MS. VILLANI: Good afternoon. I am Francesca Villani. I am the assistant town clerk for the town Hebron. I am the vice-chair of the Legislative Committee for the Connecticut Town Clerks Association. There are two bills that I just would like to talk about a little bit.

The ACT CONCERNING DEADLINES FOR MAILINGS, a really short bill, but as town clerks, we process absentee ballots. absentee ballots are part of the election count at the end of the election day. We can't possibly count ballots that are received after election day. So, we would really appreciate it if some more consideration were given to the language of this bill.

The other bill that I would like to mention is H.B. 5278, revising certain absentee voting statutes. Town clerks have supported early voting by tabular vote with no-excuse absentee voting, but we are very much against the no-excuse absentee ballot. The in-person early voting by tabulator has our support because it permits the voter to vote in person at prescribed location with no excuse necessary as to why the voter can't be available for the statutorily designated election day. The tabulator equipment

already in use would be used for the same -- for the, you know, early voting and we would tally the votes by tabulator.

The CTCA membership sees this method of voting as an opportunity to expose more voters to the election process and to make voting more convenient. The CTCA supports this method of early voting that closely resembles the current election day process. CTCA projects that early voting that places reliance on delivery by the United States Postal Service will result in disenfranchising between three and five percent of voters annually in a general election. So, for that reason, we do not support that type of voting for, you know, absentee voting by -- no-excuse absentee voting through the mail system.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you. Any questions or comments? Representative McCarthy-Vayhey.

REP. MCCARTHY-VAYHEY (133RD): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you for being here to testify before us. So, I just want to clarify. Your concern is that if we use the post office that there would be less people whose votes would be received? Or can you just clarify that concern for me?

MS. VILLANI: We have concerns with additional absentee voting. Absentee voting, the way that we do it now, is you have to have a reason in order to vote by absentee ballot. You're either disabled or for one reason or another you can't appear at the polls on the day of election. We understand that people may find it difficult to appear at -- on the day of election and would like to vote prior to that. If we have a tabular voting system, people can come to a designated place, vote early, use the

tabular voting system that we have in place right now, and that's fine.

But if we were to expand the absentee balloting system that we have now, to include no-excuse voting, it would be very difficult for us to manage as the town clerks. And it would also be a problem because we find that there are quite a few ballots that come in that do not ever get counted. They don't get counted because they come in late. They don't get counted because people don't understand the instructions. They don't sign the inner envelopes. They don't enclose the inner envelopes. They put more than one ballot inside of an envelope. These are people who think they have voted and will never know that their vote never counted. We feel that that's the wrong way to go about this. And the more people who are submitting ballots that way, the more likelihood there is that those people votes -- there will be more people whose votes are not counted. The tabulator is the way to go with that.

REP. MCCARTHY-VAYHEY (133RD): I appreciate your answer. I think that you're making a very good case for simplification of our forms and our process, because I think that there is some confusion.

MS. VILLANI: Absolutely.

REP. MCCARTHY-VAYHEY (133RD): Having lived in a state that does all vote by mail and having had a no-excuse absentee ballot that was done by mail, I think that part of what you're talking about is some change in systems and how we would have to do things. I happen to be on the other side of that issue and believe that, you know, we should be looking at that because the percentage of participation rates in the states that have gone

exclusively to no-excuse mail absentee balloting is much higher than what we have in Connecticut. But I think your points are valid in terms of the systems and the process can be a little bit confusing for people. So, I think that's something we should be talking about too. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you, Representative. Further questions or comments? Representative France.

REP. FRANCE (42ND): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I echo the comments from my colleague. I agree that we need to simplify the absentee ballot process so that we don't have these number of hang-ups; I guess I would call them. And you're right that the people that make these errors probably make them every time they vote and they have no idea, because there is no feedback. My concern is with your recommendation for a tabulator, because as I understand it is that each time you secure the tabulator and you turn it off, you have to then print the results and somehow store those results.

And that's why the registrars themselves have not recommended that process, but have encouraged in-person absentee, which would then be counted on the day of the election with the rest of the absentee ballots that have been mailed in. So, if you could address that part of it, because of my -- there's a concern on that.

MS. VILLANI: Well, I don't know exactly what the procedure would be because it hasn't been, you know, worked out at this point. But I assume that the tabulator would be kept in a secure location and that it would -- if there would be, I guess, a

choice of deciding which would be the most secure way, whether it's tabulate at the end of the day or to wait and tabulate at the end of the entire process. I don't know which would be the best and most secure way, but I'm sure that whatever way it goes, the secretary of state would make those determinations and that's how we would do it.

REP. FRANCE (42ND): Okay. Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

REP. FOX (148TH): A quick question, if I can. Is the town clerks' opposition to 5278 tied into their opposition to Senate Bill 240?

MS. VILLANI: I'm sorry.

REP. FOX (148TH): You opposed two bills, 5278, the bill of no-excuse AV voting.

MS. VILLANI: Yes. Right.

REP. FOX (148TH): And Senate Bill --

MS. VILLANI: (Senate Bill) 240.

REP. FOX (148TH): Two-four-zero. And is the opposition of it connected in the sense -- like, it sounds like your opposition to 240 had to do with AV ballots.

MS. VILLANI: The opposition to 240 is that we just think it needs further consideration. The language is too broad. You can't include absentee ballots in that postmark thing. We -- actually, someone just told me that they received a ballot that was for the 2018 election. They just received it in December of 2019. Somehow that ballot got tossed aside and it was never processed through the post office until a year later. That's -- there's no way to count that.

There's no way to keep that in the count. There's not a way for us to do that if we're getting ballots after the date that they -- you know, that the election took place, and they were postmarked before the day of the election.

REP. FOX (148TH): Okay. And the opposition to 5278, the no-excuse AB bill, is based on the fact that you think the requirement for processing would be too overwhelming?

MS. VILLANI: I'm sorry. The opposition is to the no-excuse absentee ballot voting. That's our --

REP. FOX (148TH): Mm-hmm. And that is based on the fact that you think the processing of ABs would be too overwhelming?

MS. VILLANI: We think that more voters would be disenfranchised because their votes will not get counted, because that process is cumbersome, it's paper intensive, it's antiquated, and it requires a lot of handholding to a great extent. And if we're mailing out ballots to people, they're not gonna know -- they are gonna look at the instructions. They're gonna get a little confused. And we're concerned that there will be too many people whose votes will just not count and there'll be no way for those people to know that their vote did not count.

REP. FOX (148TH): Okay. Thank you. Any further questions or comments? Thank you for your time with us and I appreciate you being here.

MS. VILLANI: Thank you.

REP. FOX (148TH): Next up I have Morgan Reiss, followed by Beth Rotman, followed by Stacey Zimmerman.

MS. REISS: Good afternoon, Representative Fox, and the distinguished members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee. Thank you for taking the time to hear my testimony in support of S.B. 233, AN ACT CONCERNING ELECTIONS. My name is Morgan Reiss. I'm a master of social work student at the UConn School of Social Work. I am an intern with the Office of the Secretary of the State, and I am eligible to vote.

The fact that I am eligible to vote is something that I and many of us in the room have never had to question. When I turned 18, I signed my name on a paper form and mailed it to my town registrar. Since that point, I have enjoyed my electoral privileges freely, even re-registering to vote online when I moved to Manchester. When you are convicted of a felony, your political future becomes much less certain. Currently, in Connecticut, you are permitted to vote if you are on probation, awaiting trial, or if you have completed your sentence and paid all related fines. You are not permitted to vote if you are incarcerated, on parole, and/or have not paid all your related fines.

Confusion around rights leads to people abstaining from voting out of fear of doing something wrong. And even when formerly incarcerated people legally can vote, the fear and confusion of past restrictions keeps them from registering and/or getting to the polls. Our judicial system is confusing and punitive enough. Let's not continue to have our electoral system be the same. Beyond confusion around rights, restriction of voting rights for people with a felony conviction disproportionately impacts black and brown people. In 2014, there were 9.4 black people incarcerated to

every one white person in Connecticut. And in 2016, 2.66 percent of the African American population was disenfranchised compared to 0.61 percent of the general Connecticut population.

Historically, restricting voting rights through the guise of criminal justice was used as a tool to silence minoritized voices from the political arena, and it still functions in the same capacity today. Restricting access to the polls on the basis of a criminal conviction delivered by a biased system unduly prevents black and brown people from full civic participation.

As you've heard many times today, Connecticut is also the last state in the Northeast to still restrict people with a felony conviction from voting, and one of only three to make a distinction between rights for people on parole and people on probation. Senate Bill 233 will align our state with our own existing policies around voting and brings us up to speed with our eight closest neighbors. I urge you to support our democracy by supporting Senate Bill 233. Thank you again for your time.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you very much. Any questions or comments? Representative McCarthy-Vahey.

REP. MCCARTHY-VAYHEY (133RD): Thank you, Mr. Chair. And Morgan, I understand that there a number of other social workers here today. I'm sorry that I missed the, but I'm glad to be here for you and appreciate you taking the time to be here as part of your social work practice and your internship and your own personal testimony. In particular, I just wanted to thank you for highlighting the racial

disparities and the injustice in terms of what that means for particularly minority communities. So, thanks for being with us today and thanks to the other social workers who testified today as well.

MS. REISS: Thank you.

REP. FOX (148TH): Any further questions or comments? A quick question, if I may. Early in your testimony you mentioned how you had to change your voter registration a number of different times recently?

MS. REISS: Just once, yeah.

REP. FOX (148TH): Can you tell me a little bit about that process, how you thought it was efficient or not efficient, or beneficial or helpful? How'd you feel about doing it?

MS. REISS: Yeah. So, I just went online to the Secretary of the State's website. It was really simple to do. And by working there, I knew that that was a relatively easy process, but I also know that there's -- it's hard to get information out about voting, so not as many people know about this process as there should be. But for me, it was simple. I knew about it and it worked.

REP. FOX (148TH): Well, how long have you been voting?

MS. REISS: Five years.

REP. FOX (148TH): Have you ever voted by absentee ballot by any chance?

MS. REISS: Yes.

REP. FOX (148TH): How'd you find that process?

MS. REISS: A little more challenging.

REP. FOX (148TH): Mm-hmm. In what way?

MS. REISS: So, you have to show up in person to pick up your absentee ballot and then mail it back within a certain amount of time, and know the right deadlines and know which form goes where. I think it is useful because you can take a little more time to look at the candidates and really think about who you're voting for in that moment, rather than ahead of time. But it is a long process and confusing.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you very much for your testimony. Any further questions or comments? Thank you for being here today. I appreciate your time.

MS. REISS: Thank you.

REP. FOX (148TH): Next up is Beth Rotman, followed by Stacey Zimmerman, followed by Ann Gadwah. Good afternoon.

MS. ROTMAN: Hi. Good afternoon. My name is Beth Rotman and I am the director of Money in Politics and Ethics for the national organization of Common Cause. Common Cause is a nonpartisan, nonprofit citizen lobby that works to improve the way government operates for all of us. Common Cause has more than 1.2 million members around the country.

So, I'd like to thank the leadership of this and the members of this committee for the really diligent work that you're doing to keep the State of Connecticut at the forefront of election reform. Connecticut became one of the first states - or the first state to pass the strongest set of campaign finance reforms throughout the legislative process.

And one of the key goals of these reforms was to encourage broader participation in our state's democratic processes.

So really, it's consistent with Connecticut's role as a national leader that this committee would consider moving forward with codification of automatic voter registration. automatic voter registration is bringing new people into the process and helping create a strong 21st century democracy where everyone can participate. But it does a lot more than that.

AVR modernizes voter registration while encouraging accuracy. automatic voter registration makes it easier to ensure that only eligible voters are able to cast ballots, which better protects the integrity of our elections. It helps us make sure our records are accurate and complete. AVR is really gaining momentum across the country and we've heard some about that already today.

At least twenty states and the District of Columbia have already approved the policy, and many, more across our country are considering legislation to either implement or expand AVR reform. So, I applaud this committee for the leadership role you are taking here and I thank you on behalf of our 1.2 million members around the country for keeping Connecticut at the forefront of election reform.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you very much, Ms. Rotman. Any questions or comments for Ms. Rotman? A question, if I can.

MS. ROTMAN: Sure.

REP. FOX (148TH): Can you discuss for me the AVR implementation in other states? The AVR -- the

implement -- the use of AVR in other states? Do you have any information on that?

MS. ROTMAN: Well, I mean, I can tell you -- I mean, it can be quite different. Generally -- and I know some other folks are gonna talk about this maybe more in detail, but. So, for example, the DMV is one of the most common agencies where this happens. I know this particular bill here, in Connecticut, is looking at expanding that beyond the DMV to many, many other agencies. So, I would say that because in the U.S., every state has its own flair and does things a bit differently. I'll talk sort of generally. But a couple of the things that states look at are whether somebody's gonna be asked upfront when they go to an agency, if this is something they'd like to do through your going to get your driver's license.

And I actually recently did this. I now work in D.C. and I'm registered in Maryland. I needed to get a new license in Maryland, so I went there and they asked me at the end of the process if I wanted to register to vote, which was very helpful for me. I was making an international move, signing for a lot of things. The license was one of a long list and they asked at the end.

A lot of states do it at the end. There are some people that think it should happen at the beginning. That's one factor. And I think that the issue of sort of which agencies and how those agencies talk together are really key and important. I mean, I think that one of the things that I heard earlier from, you know, Sam, with the funny -- the long last name, Olikier-Friedland, at the Center for Secure and Modern Elections, who they also look a lot at how

this is implemented across the country, and I think I'll defer to them on some of the real details sort of state by state, because they really have done a good study on this, And I'll get back to you if it's not sort of all in their written testimony.

But I'll tell you that one of the things that is really critical from the implementation perspective and that really helps with this is the fact you are picking up on a system that is already asking for some documentation and already giving some accuracy. So, what's consistent across the states is you are giving some opportunity for this sort of built-in -- you know, I needed, like, sixteen forms of ID when I went to get my driver's license. I had a copy of my, you know, 8,000-page lease and a whole lot more than what we would ever feel comfortable asking for people for a lot of important reasons if you were sort of just there to register to vote. So, in a way, we're improving accuracy and doing things that go beyond what we are ultimately comfortable as good government advocates and we don't want to discourage people from registering to vote. A lot of times asking for too many papers is used to discourage people from registering to vote.

So here, we're latching onto a process of, for example, a driver's license, which is the most common. I was there with my lease, there with all these different forms of documentation that had already been checked, and so now I was also registered to vote. So, that's probably the most common across the country. But I'll get back to you with the other major examples.

REP. FOX (148TH): Okay. Thank you. One more big, broad, kind of softball question, a Common Cause perspective.

MS. ROTMAN: Sure.

REP. FOX (148TH): Voting rights in Connecticut, where does Connecticut stand?

MS. ROTMAN: On?

REP. FOX (148TH): On just voting, voting rights and people's ability to vote, of a national perspective and Common Cause perspective.

MS. ROTMAN: Oh, yeah. I mean, so we are working on structural democracy issues in many, many different ways. So, we are trying to open up the process and make it fairer and more accessible for everybody and encourage voting, and to make it so that it's also more accurate, more transparent. So, we're certainly working very hard on that. We're also trying to protect the integrity of our elections, trying to deal with the scary issues that we've had on foreign interference and misinformation and disinformation. So, sort of in every possible that we can almost think of in trying to protect and secure election integrity.

Common Cause has some folks on the ground in states across this country working very hard on that as we get ready these really critical upcoming elections.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you. Any further questions or comments? Appreciate your time and testimony today. Thank you for being here.

MS. ROTMAN: Thank you very much.

REP. FOX (148TH): Next up I have Stacey Zimmerman, followed by Ann Gadwah, followed by Shannon Lane. Good afternoon.

MR. ZIMMERMAN: Good afternoon, Chairman Fox and members of the committee. My name is Stacey Zimmerman. I'm here with the Service Employees International Union Connecticut State Council. I'm the associate director. We have 65,000 members here in the State of Connecticut and we believe democracy functions best when people are engaged. We're a democratic union and we find that when our members are engaged and participating in our union activities, our union is stronger. So we don't believe that would be any different for the State of Connecticut or the nation, that when citizens are engaged and ready to vote they are more inclined to actually care about their community and be involved in their community, hence, we support Senate Bill 233, and we also support early voting and no absentee -- and no-excuse absentee. We've supported those two over the past probably decade or so here in the great State of Connecticut.

We truly believe that allowing folks that may or may not have had issues in the past to register and vote as soon as they've done their time to be very important. When you get off parole or if you're on parole, you're out of prison, one of the best things to do is become back -- reengaged in your community. And how do you become reengaged in your community? By look -- thinking about government, acting in government and voting, and teaching your community and your family to vote.

I mean, that's a thing that we in this country have not done very well compared to the rest of the world

and we hope that, you know, bills such as these will actually increase the ability of America to become the representative of democracy it was supposed to be in the beginning.

So, once again, SEIU supports 233 and early voting and no-excuse absentees and I'm happy to take any questions if you have any.

REP. FOX (148TH): Questions or comments?
Representative McCarthy-Vahey.

REP. MCCARTHY-VAYHEY (133RD): Thank you, Mr. Chair. And thank you for being here with us today. I just want to say you just said something that I hadn't really heard anyone say around this issue explicitly, which is teaching your family to vote. And I thought that was pretty powerful because we've talked a lot about the issue of access, of the power of modeling and just the generational aspect of that. So, thank you for highlighting that. I think that's a really important point.

MR. ZIMMERMAN: Well, thank you. I mean, I think it's something that we have not seen in this country in a long time as far as teaching civics and/or social studies, something of that nature, really in a direct manner. And if you aren't learning it in school, you gotta learn it at home. And if we inhibit people from being allowed to participate, you're not only losing them, you're losing their children, you're losing their grandchildren, and eventually you're losing a vote.

REP. MCCARTHY-VAYHEY (133RD): Well, and I think that you're -- the teaching civic, you know, you can teach so much, but the actual act of doing that. And if you can't go vote, you're not having that

experience with your child or your grandchild. And we always -- we do family voting. We joke about it. We go as a family whenever -- well, pretty much most every year since my children were really little. And it does make an impact. So, I -- thanks again for that.

MR. ZIMMERMAN: I mean, imagine if indeed you go to any place where your life intersects with government and if you have your children or whoever with you and see that you registered to vote when you're at Social Services, when you're at the DMV. I mean, that is very engaging. That is something I think we've waited too long for and I'm glad that this fine committee and the secretary of state have thought that this is a worthy thing to do in a short session. So, thank you.

REP. FOX (148TH): A quick question for you. Can you tell me a little bit about your membership and why or how you think that that would tie in support of early -- no-excuse AB or early voting or just?

MR. ZIMMERMAN: I mean, our membership, as you all know, we have about, like I said, 65,000 members, everybody from janitors to doctors. Schedules are not as -- nobody works from nine to five anymore, even in a good union job. You still have weird hours that you may not be in town. And yeah, you can say you're not in town and fill out an absentee ballot, but some people are, like, well, I was here from six to seven, so I guess I was in town, and they're afraid to do it. We just need to make this as easy as possible.

And maybe even go a step farther and look at, you know, maybe we have some holidays we want to swap around and make election day a holiday. I mean,

many other countries do that. They do other things. And I think we really need to come together and figure out how we can get more people to participate in our system.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you very much for your time and testimony. Further questions or comments? Thank you for being here today, sir. Appreciate your time and testimony today. Next I have Ann Gadwah, followed by Shannon Lane, followed by Cheyenne Tavares. Good afternoon.

MS. GADWAH: Good afternoon, Chairman Fox and all members of the committee. My name is Ann Gadwah. I'm the chapter chair of Sierra Club Connecticut. I'm here today to testify on Senate Bill 233, AN ACT CONCERNING ELECTIONS. And actually, as I talk, I realize this is a good -- that the last gentleman was a good segue to my first statement here.

First of all, I'd like to say I grew up in a house that believed in and loved America. My dad, as they say, was one of the kind of guys who was born to wave the flag. I grew up believing we're the greatest country and democracy in the world, that our elections are fair and equal, and representative of all the people in the country. Of course, I grew up, and my rosy view became more realistic, and I learned that this wasn't always the case, and in many cases still is not the case.

And though my faith has been shaken at times, I still believe in the promise of fair and free elections and that America can be the greatest democracy in the world, and so does Sierra Club. And that is why I wanted to testify on behalf of Sierra Club Connecticut today. We at Sierra Club strongly support Senate Bill 233. We believe this

bill will streamline and simplify our registration process, that it will modernize voter registration and keep voter rolls secure and up to date. That is can reduce long lines on election day, save money and labor, and protect the integrity of our elections.

But more importantly, we think that this bill will substantially expand voting rights and enhance our democracy. Being able to vote, register to vote electronically at more locations will expand these rights to more women, minorities and lower-income citizens. Historically, these voices have been under represented in elections. Bringing these new voices into the political process will be invaluable to help address the concerns of their communities, inequities in our society and environmental injustices.

Restoring voting rights to returning citizens both helps to reintegrate them into society and invest in the duties of citizenship. These are voices that have long been silenced and could be a step in the right direction to correct some of the injustices of our current political -- excuse me, our current prison system, as it disproportionately incarcerates people of color and lower-income individuals. We believe that in this time and this place we should be doing everything we can to expand voting rights to all people, to bring as people into the political process as we can, to hear from new and diverse voices.

The Voting Rights Act remains gutted to this day. We need to do everything we can at the state level to make sure it is easy as possible for as many people as possible to register to vote. This will

both enhance our democracy and help deliver the promise of representation to all people in Connecticut. Thank you and I'd be happy to answer any questions.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you. Any questions or comments? I have a quick question.

MS. GADWAH: Sure.

REP. FOX (148TH): What is the purpose of Sierra Club? What is their primary goal or advocacy?

MS. GADWAH: Sierra Club is one of the oldest grassroots environmental organizations in the country.

REP. FOX (148TH): And I ask that because I've been on this committee for a number years now. It just seems -- I welcome the support and love the support. But is there a reason why Sierra Club has suddenly -- not suddenly, maybe -- why they've come up in support towards this now?

MS. GADWAH: Sierra Club -- yeah, Sierra club has expanded their purview a little bit in different issues that we get involved in, and voting rights is one of them, particularly because we see a lot of environmental injustice in the world, and we want to be able to raise up voices of those communities that have -- the concerns of those communities, actually, you know, address.

REP. FOX (148TH): How long has Sierra Club this position on this? Is it relatively new to your club to advocate for these things?

MS. GADWAH: They've been doing -- Sierra Club's been doing a lot of, you know, I guess, soul searching and find out ways we can help in different

social justice issues and things about the last five years.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you. That's good to hear. Thank you for being here.

MS. GADWAH: Thank you.

REP. FOX (148TH): Further questions or comments? Thank you for your time and testimony. I appreciate you being here.

MS. GADWAH: All right. Thank you.

REP. FOX (148TH): Next up I have Shannon Lane, followed by Cheyenne Tavares, followed by Natalie Seier.

MS. LANE: Good afternoon.

REP. FOX (148TH): Good afternoon

MS. LANE: My name is Shannon Lane and like many of the people you've seen here today, I am a social worker. And let me say, as somebody who used to teach at UConn School of Social Work, seeing so many UConn social worker students makes my heart very happy. I teach at Yeshiva University in New York City in the School of Social Work. I'm also the deputy registrar of voters in Bethany, Connecticut. And I work with the Nancy A. Humphreys Institute for Political Social Work at UConn and we do a lot of research around voter access and voter rights.

You have my written testimony, but since a lot of the things I have to say have been said, I thought I would take the opportunity to respond to a couple of things that have come up in discussion. And the first is Secretary Merrill mentioned about five hours ago that in Connecticut you need to be

eighteen and a citizen in order to vote. And she's right except that in the State of Connecticut we also then say that if you have been convicted of a felony, you are a second class of citizens and your rights are different from the rest. And I think it's really important to acknowledge that that history of disenfranchising people with felony convictions has a very racist intent to it. And if you look at the historical and the legislative intent of those laws you can see that intention very clearly.

I recently had the opportunity to write an article with Sarah Shannon from the Sentencing Project and Tanya Rhodes Smith at the University of Connecticut, to talk about how that racist intent affects us today. And I would argue as some other have that it's important to allow people on parole to vote, but I think we should go a step further and follow the example of Vermont and Maine and stop disenfranchising anyone because of their involvement with the criminal justice system.

The second point I wanted to make is that in terms of -- on the voter registration. There was a question raised earlier, I think by Representative France, or another colleague, about what would happen if there was a multiple -- you know you said had moved several times and you had multiple registrations in the system because you interacted with automatic voter registration.

And let me just say, as other people in registrar's offices can attest, every time you interact with the AVR system, that comes to us in the registrar's office and we compare that to the state database and we have multiple opportunities to make sure if

you're registered somewhere else we take you off the rolls there. And there also is another opportunity that if you are registered, if we somehow missed you entirely and you were registered in multiple places, you would become inactive in the place that you were no longer voting and we'd follow up with an annual or biannual canvas. And we would have the opportunity to clean the voter rolls at that point. And so we have several systems in place to make sure that that doesn't happen.

And the third thing I wanted to say that is not particularly germane to S.B. 233, but came up earlier, is I would absolutely argue that our absentee ballot system in this state is broken and needs to be addressed. Every time I count absentee ballots on election day and I have to not count somebody's vote because they put their ballot on the outside of the inner envelope instead of on the inside of the inner envelope, because they missed one of the several places that you need to sign the envelope, which may not always be obvious if you haven't been part of that system before. We are taking somebody who went through the steps of going to get an absentee ballot and getting it mailed to them and sending it back to us, and we are disenfranchising them. And that system needs to be addressed soon. So, thank you for your attention. I appreciate it.

REP. FOX (148TH): Questions or comments? Senator Haskell.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you so much for your testimony and for being here today. You mentioned that you had co-authored an article on the race-based and racist legacy of

disenfranchisement, particularly around those who are incarcerated or were recently incarcerated. Could you talk a little bit about the historical origin of that -- of those laws?

MS. LANE: Sure. I -- as my -- one of my colleagues, Cindy Dibugallo (Phonetic) says, we don't really have room for Jim Crow here in Connecticut, but the Jim Crow laws are where a bounty of disenfranchised -- disenfranchisement laws come from. So, you can look at the legislative intent across the country and many of these laws were passed at a time that people thought it was perfectly acceptable to say on the floor of the Virginia State Legislature, for example, the reason for these laws is to keep this group of people from participating.

And if you look at sort of the history of voting in the U.S., it was only sort of after reconstruction and the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments that states started to feel that it was necessary to put felon disenfranchisement in there, in their state constitution or in their state laws, and that was a clear response to the fact that there was now a substantial member of African Americans in the electorate.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Thank you so much for bringing that historical perspective today. I think that that's really important and I'm grateful for your testimony. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you, Senator. Any further questions or comments? Representative McCarthy-Vayhey.

REP. MCCARTHY-VAYHEY (133RD): Thank you, Mr. Chair. And Shannon, I also -- or Professor Lane, I should say. I would like to just thank you for being here today, but also for your work over time. And again, as I -- as you heard me mentioning a few moments ago and as Senator Haskell was highlighting helping us to understand the history and whether there's intent today or not. Just the reality of what we face today and I think we have an opportunity to change that path. And I'm really grateful for your advocacy. Thank you.

MS. LANE: Thank you. And I think, obviously, there's more work to be done around the mass incarceration and the bias within the criminal justice system. But since that connects the voting laws, there's a place to address this here as well.

REP. MCCARTHY-VAYHEY (133RD): If I may, Mr. Chair, just a follow up question to your comment about the absentee ballot process. And you heard earlier, we had some conversation and agreement here that we think that, yes, there needs to be some changes in that. And I'm just wondering if you had one or two specific things that you thought would help to simply that process while still, you know, maintaining integrity in it?

MS. LANE: Yeah, absolutely. What I would say -- so, the topic was raised from the representative from the town clerks about using tabulators rather than paper absentee ballots, and I certainly am not empowered to speak for ROVAC, but that has some security concerns associated with it. So, if a tabulator is gonna be open and accessible for multiple days leading up to an election, I think that there's some security issues there. I do think

that we -- it's something we should talk about. But I think we need to be really mindful of security. Our tabulators right now are so -- are really safe compared to what some other states are doing. I don't want to -- I don't want to mess with that.

But in terms of the paper ballots, so when you vote in an absentee ballot the -- I was a student for a very long period of time and voted absentee for most of those years in systems that were much easier than this. So, in Connecticut, you -- when you vote, you fill out your ballot, you put it inside an envelope; you sign the outside of that envelope. You then have to take that envelope, put it in another envelope and sign the outside of that envelope. Maybe that doesn't seem so complicated, but every time I've ever counted an absentee ballot, I've had to spoil one of them because somebody had missed one of those steps in the process.

And it's also interestingly now the same process we use for people voting who are in the military or overseas. That process is still complicated, but simpler. So, there are some, obviously, other ways to do it.

REP. MCCARTHY-VAYHEY (133RD): If I may continue, Mr. Chair. Now, this is like if you give a mouse a cookie, right, but. So you just named that the military process is different, and I'm curious if you can give the specific example as to how that process is different and would it make sense for us to think about aligning with how our members of the military vote.

MS. LANE: Well, and I believe there's some discussion on the federal level to change the way members of the military vote and actually

potentially have some online voting, which has its own set of concerns. But the requirement to have multiple envelopes and have signatures at every step of the way, what you're doing at each of those points is you're signing that you understand the statement that says I am who I say I am, you know, yada yada. But, A - nobody reads those. So, yes, they're signing it but it's not serving anything to the purpose, and B - why do we have to have them sign multiple times?

I don't necessarily have a problem with continuing with the current system if we needed to. But if we could change the regulations and allow registrars to accept just the external envelope rather than having it have to be inside the internal envelope, inside the external envelope, it doesn't seem to me like that would endanger our voting process, but it would certainly enfranchise some people who are currently being left out.

REP. MCCARTHY-VAYHEY (133RD): Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you very much. Any further questions or comments? Representative Mastrofrancesco.

REP. MASTROFRANCESCO (80TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you very much for your testimony. I just had a quick question on your testimony and maybe you can just give me some information. You had said in your testimony that, historically, felony disenfranchisement laws were written into the state constitutions and statutes to explicitly limits the power, the political power of African Americans and other marginalized groups. Are you implying that the State of Connecticut -- this was

done explicitly on purpose in the State of Connecticut Constitution? And if so, where did you get that information? I was confused.

MS. LANE: Oh, sure. So -- well, so a lot of we know about felony disenfranchisement laws come from looking at -- we can look at things like the, you know, the -- we can look at the proceedings of the state legislature when they were passed. What often, though, happens is that -- with something like this, it will get pass -- it'll start to get passed in one part of the country and then it sort of gradually moves around the country and everybody adopts it.

So, the states that I've looked at it specifically and that I could pull direct quotes for you are not in Connecticut. But I'm happy to get back to you and with the other people who have studied in Connecticut specifically to see whether what happened in Connecticut was as explicitly intended to disenfranchise African Americans or whether that was just -- it was part of -- that was the national trend and Connecticut followed it. I don't have specific quotes from Connecticut, but I'd be happy to look to see who has those.

REP. MASTROFRANCESCO (80TH): Well, thank you. I just -- I was just -- the way it is written -- it's written that you are implying that the State of Connecticut Constitution, that was done on purpose on the State of Connecticut. That's why I just wanted to clarify to back up where you got that information and where it was coming from. But that's the only question I had. Thank you very much for your testimony. I know it's been a long day and

you've been waiting, but that's much appreciated.
Thank you.

MS. LANE: Thank you.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you, Representative.
Further questions or comments? Thank you for being
here today. I appreciate your time.

MS. LANE: Thank you.

REP. FOX (148TH): Cheyenne Tavares, I understand is
no longer here. Natalie Seier, followed by Chad
Schroeder. Good afternoon.

MS. SEIER: Good afternoon, Chairperson Fox and
members of the Government Administration and
Election Committee. I am here in support of the
S.B. 233, AN ACT CONCERNING ELECTIONS. My name is
Natalie Seier. I'm currently a sophomore at UConn
and a member of UCONNPIRG, where I work on the New
Voters Project. Our goals are voter registration
and voter education for young students.

On my eighteenth birthday, one of my most memorable
moments was registering to vote. Since then, I have
not only registered myself, but spent countless
hours with a clipboard on UConn's campus, walking my
fellow through the process of voter registration.
Student-led activism can be seen all across our
state from grassroots work all the way up to
legislative initiatives on issues of climate change,
affordable education and food and housing
insecurity.

There's no question that students are passionate
about making real political change. However, we
consistently see young people turning out to the
polls in the lowest numbers. These trends are not

from a lack of concern and engagement, but a political process that has not been made accessible and convenient to students and other marginalized groups. The implementation of automatic voter registration will benefit those who have found challenges in navigating the election process. Young people, especially students, endure numerous stressors from coursework, jobs and financial worries, social pressure and more. Exercising their vote, their voice, should not be filled with red tape and unfamiliar processes.

Automatic voter registration has the potential to increase registration rates for people of color, women and those with lower incomes. The citizen's right to vote is the foundation of this country and our state's democracy. Our system should not complicate that right. Further, our system should not withhold that right. Current parolees should have the right to vote. To rehabilitate individuals for their personal benefit and that of our community is we must offer the opportunity and encourage civic engagement.

Now allowing those who are parole to vote and exercise their rights, but expecting them to engage towards our greater society is hypocritical. Our system is to be a place of justice for all and we must encourage voting among all people. I strongly support this bill and urge the Government Elections and Administration Committee to do the same. Thank you.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you, Natalie, for your testimony. Questions or comments? Senator Haskell.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): I just wanted to say thank you so much for testifying and for your patient

today. I have had the pleasure of getting to know PIRG over the last few months and I'm so inspired by the activism that students on campus, specifically at UConn, continues to undergo. So, thank you so much for weighing in.

MS. SEIER: Thank you.

REP. FOX (148TH): Further questions or comments? Can I ask a quick question? Can you give me an idea of what election day is like at UConn?

MS. SEIER: So, this past election day, we actually saw really high rates for a local election, because in Storrs there was the renewable -- one-hundred percent renewable energies and that's to heat our school up. So, it was rainy, but we actually had a lot of students come out and vote. It can be complicated, though, because we in PIRG and the New Voters Project work with the school to get bus signs going. But there's a lot of students who are in labs until 8 o'clock, who have full days, and can't take the time to sit on a bus for half an hour to go and wait in line.

So, in 2018, I know we saw more than 2,000 students register to vote for the midterms. So there -- as I said, there is that passion and concern for the political state of our country, but it isn't always accessible to students. And it's hard to prioritize when you do have many other things going on that seem like the forefront of your.

REP. FOX (148TH): What is PIRG doing in anticipation of the 2020 election? Anything in particular?

MS. SEIER: So, currently, as I said, I work on the New Voters Project. We are -- we work completely

nonpartisan, so right now we're preparing a voter toolkit for students that will just basically just explain the entire election process, the different kind elections, how to vote, as I said, where our polling locations are, how to get the buses. So, that's what we are doing. We're also still doing our final pushes for voter registration for the primaries.

REP. FOX (148TH): Do you anticipate the primary turnout to be fairly high?

MS. SEIER: We hope so.

REP. FOX (148TH): Any further questions or comments? Thank you for being here today. I appreciate all your efforts.

MS. SEIER: Thank you.

REP. FOX (148TH): Have a nice day. Next up Chad Schroeder, followed by Carol Riemers, followed by Thomas Swann.

MR. SCHROEDER: Good afternoon, Chair and members of the committee. I'm Chadwick Schroeder and I'm a student at the University of Connecticut. And I'm here today to testify in support of S.B. 233. I'm a junior political science/environmental studies double major and I'm here today to relay the perspective of a student who understands the history of what voting rights in this country look like.

Since the founding of this country, the right to vote and participate has always been qualified in some form or another, designed to restrict various groups and peoples from participating. However, the universal and unadulterated right to vote and participate in elections is integral to any idea of

democracy and freedom. Today, there are over six million American citizens who are restricted from participating in our great democracy.

Today, a little less than half of the American electorate doesn't participate in our elections. We may blame individuals and groups for their lack of participation, but we must look at the root causes and not easy justification, like they don't care. For too long we have made human beings fight their entire lives just to have a voice and a vote in this country. 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 were meant to and designed to disproportionately put people of color in prison. I want all of you to consider the message the state is sending to human beings when we tell them that their voice and participation is no longer important. 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 their fundamental humanity, but that their intrinsic value 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 about fraudulent elections and the integrity of them to justify continued disenfranchisement of those who have served their time and who are trying to register all students and all people to vote. It is time for every single elected official, regardless of partisan affiliation, to ensure that the right to vote for

everyone is guaranteed. You do not get to choose who should vote and you do not get to say who shouldn't. That is stacking the electorate and is honestly fundamentally democratic.

If the only way for your party or your political group to retain power is through disenfranchisement and voter suppression, that is not democracy, but authoritarianism. It is February 28th of 2020. If you're not willing to stand to fight for every single American'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 people of color, 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 for the 21st century and that me and every other human being in this state has a voice, that it matters and that our participation, regardless of our partisan affiliation, matters.

A democracy is only as strong as the effort the states puts in to ensure that the most vulnerable in every single one of our communities is able to access and participate to the fullest extent in the democratic process. Thank you for your time and I urge you to support this bill in its entirety.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you, Mr. Schroeder. Any questions or comments for Mr. Schroeder? I have a quick one, if I may. What year are you at UConn?

MR. SCHROEDER: I'm a junior.

REP. FOX (148TH): Do you see many students, your colleagues at UConn, who show up on campus not registered to vote? Are you seeing the inclination maybe that more and more students are being registered when they arrive?

MR. SCHROEDER: I think more and more students are arriving registered to campus. Specifically UConn, we usually have a larger issue of turning out voters. Most students are registered when they get to campus, but we need to ensure that the students that are coming to our campus, all of them registered. Because as many of you probably know, the resources and registration by the political parties is very differentiated and often doesn't focus on registering the working class and people of color. So, I would say even in the pool of UConn students, they are gonna be the groups that are gonna be under prioritized and not given the opportunity to participate.

REP. FOX (148TH): And does PIRG advocate for registration drives? Do they get word out about AV voting, things of that nature?

MR. SCHROEDER: We try to get the word out in as many ways as possible about voting. As Natalie had stated, we are a nonpartisan organization, so we try to mobilize students from every political party to get them to vote and turn out and try to provide them information on how to access elections in the easiest way possible.

REP. FOX (148TH): Okay. Thank you very much for your efforts. Any further questions or comments? Thank you for being here. I appreciate your patience. Have a nice day.

MR. SCHROEDER: Thank you.

REP. FOX (148TH): Next up is Carol Reimers -- yeah, I don't see her. She's not here. Followed by Thomas Swan, followed Eva Bermudez-Zimmerman.

MR. SWAN: Good afternoon.

REP. FOX (148TH): Good afternoon.

MR. SWAN: Representative Fox, Senator Flexer, other members of GAE, my name's Tom Swan. I'm the executive director of the Connecticut Citizen Action Group. I want to thank you today for holding the hearing. I've submitted written testimony, so I'm gonna be really brief.

I want to associate myself with the previous speaker. I think he did a really great job and summarized it really well. Our country's had a long a history of trying to become more democratic and allowing people to become enfranchised. We've technological advances that the Constitution State should take advantage of and fulfill. And for anybody to vote against automatic voter registration and to say that they're in favor of democracy, I can't believe it. I just don't think that's there's any grain of truth behind that. We've already done it successfully for the Department of Motor Vehicles. We should do it for the other agencies in the state that deal with people that don't necessarily drive or don't have a license. It's only the right thing to do. It's only the fair thing to do.

Restoring the voting rights of parolees is also the right and fair thing to do. We've taken great strides the last few years in reforming our criminal justice system. How do you justify denying these people the right to vote, to say we don't want you to become full participants in our society? The proposal, I think it's Resolution 15, in terms of allowing for early voting. I heard Representative McCarthy-Vayhey earlier today about the success in other states and how much of a higher voter participation rate they had. Why doesn't the Constitution State -- why would anybody argue against that within the Constitution State?

I've said enough about that today. You've heard from a lot of people who you don't normally hear from and feel really passionately about this and want to see you get this done this year. And I believe you're gonna do that and I thank you for doing that.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you, Mr. Swan. Any questions or comments for Mr. Swan? A quick question, if I may, sir. You've been around this building for a number of years. Can you, without being too general or too broad, give an idea of, in your opinion, the evolution of voting rights for the past few years?

MR. SWAN: I mean, we could talk about some of the things that we've done here within the State of Connecticut, in a time period here, whether it's direct primaries with it's passage of the Citizens Election Program, whether it's restoring voting rights for felons. These are all things that we've done that have improved our system and made it better, off of the top of my head. This is another

step in building a more democratic society and helping us reach the potential in terms of living up to being the Constitution State.

I mean, seriously, how can anybody argue against giving people the right to vote and making it easier for people to take -- to exercise their right? It is a right and we need to acknowledge that. And these folks deserve to be given every chance to take advantage of it.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you very much. Any further questions or comments? Appreciate you being here and appreciate your patience. Have a nice day. Next, Eva Bermudez-Zimmerman, followed by Kelly Moore, followed by Jillian Lundari. Good afternoon.

MS. BERMUDEZ-ZIMMERMAN: Good afternoon. Thank you, Chairman Fox and members of the committee. Here I am testifying today not only on behalf of SEIU, CSEA Local 2001, but also as myself, something I rarely get to do. CSEA represents over 25,000 workers, union members here throughout the State of Connecticut. One particular group that I'm currently the organizing director for and childcare director for is for the childcare providers who provide in-home daycare, and they are throughout the State of Connecticut.

In the last six years of me being able to organize and have the privilege to interact with so many kids and so many dedicated educators, I realized that the ability to register to vote, get access to the ballot is very difficult when you're an in-home daycare provider and you cannot leave your home while you're providing care. You cannot leave your home because that's the only means of actually being able to take care of the children. And if you have

six kids in one moment, when they're all toddlers and you want to make it more interesting and having a field trip to go and vote, then you have to get permission slips, you have to make sure that there's liability waivers. It's exciting in concept, but more difficult to execute when you're actually doing it.

So, when I'm asking the providers to volunteer, to lobby, to be part of the political system, they're excited to do so, but it comes with a lot of preparation and a lot of planning. And when you're looking at the bill that's before us, which is 233, this is an opportunity to give those rights and that support for those providers and other childcare providers and other workers out there who don't have the ability and the access to do so as quickly.

For my own personal story, I had to fly back from Puerto Rico, from the university, to come and actually register for the first time and then do an absentee ballot. And I know that today we've heard the testimony of multiple UConn students and younger students, who are saying how if you have an electronic option, if you have more access, then it would be easier and it'd take away the difficulties and the hurdles. And with my own story, to fly down to register is not something comes easy for every student.

To think, oh, I want to be part of my community. I want to make a difference. I'm gonna make a point to prepare myself and be on timelines and pay through my own pocket a flight to come down and be part of that process, is not exactly something that every young person has on the forefront of their mind when they're thinking about student debt, when

they're thinking about difficulties in the home, and they're trying to get their grades up. I was fortunate enough to be able to do that.

And throughout the years, every year after year, organization and door-knocking and registering on my own accord, new people getting involved through the voting process, I've noticed that the hurdles just seem insurmountable too many times. And this is just one step further to try to give that access and get to a place -- we're in the 21st century where technology has the capacity and the ability to connect workers and citizens here in the United States to be part of their American right.

I know that it might seem a little corny to say American right, but that is our option, that is our privilege as American citizens and Connecticut citizens, to go and vote. So I do hope you support the 233 in support of AVR and give that American right and that ability to vote much easier for every American citizen and every Connecticut citizen here. Thank you.

REP. FOX (148TH): Perfect timing. Any questions or comments? I have a quick question, if I may. I presume for the same reason why you indicate you support 233 for the AVR purposes, would your organization or you personally also support early AB voting or no-excuse AB voting or early voting?

MS. BERMUDEZ-ZIMMERMAN: Yes.

REP. FOX (148TH): Okay. But it's the same reason I presume.

MS. BERMUDEZ-ZIMMERMAN: Absolutely.

REP. FOX (148TH): Great. And can I -- could I ask an individual question? Can you tell me a little bit about your membership?

MS. BERMUDEZ-ZIMMERMAN: Yes. So, childcare provider -- CSEA has state employees. We have municipal employees. We also have private sector employees. What connects these employees together is some public finance or some public funding through their employments. So, our bus drivers, who are private sector employees, get funding through the public schools in order to pay for busing routes through their private employer and then, in turn, we organize them as union members of our municipal and state employee union, CSEA.

With childcare providers, luckily with some people who are in the room today, in support of passing legislation a few years ago were able to get the right to organize and be part of a union through the OEC Care for Kids Program. That exists because it's state financed. They collect the Care for Kids subsidy through their parents that, in turn, gives them access to become part of our union because they're getting some sort of public finance through their employment.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you. And again, just to confirm your testimony today, it's both yours individually and as -- on behalf of your organization as well.

MS. BERMUDEZ-ZIMMERMAN: Yes. That's correct.

REP. FOX (148TH): Great.

MS. BERMUDEZ-ZIMMERMAN: And just a point of correction. In my signup, my name is spelled wrong, but I'll let the clerk know.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you very much.

MS. BERMUDEZ-ZIMMERMAN: Thank you.

REP. FOX (148TH): Further questions or comments?
Thank you for being here today. Appreciate your
testimony.

MS. BERMUDEZ-ZIMMERMAN: Thank you.

REP. FOX (148TH): Have a nice weekend. Next up
Kelly Moore, followed Jillian Lundari, followed by
Randy Collins. Good afternoon.

MS. MOORE: Good afternoon. Thank you, Chairman
Fox, Ranking Member France, and distinguished
members of this committee. My name is Kelly Moore.
I'm the policy counsel of the ACLU of Connecticut.
I'm here to testify in support of Senate Bill 233,
but first I'd like to note that the ACLU has
submitted written testimony on a number of other
bills this committee is hearing today.

We've submitted testimony in support of Senate Joint
Resolution 15 and also in support of House Bill
5277, which is AN ACT DECREASING FEES FOR COPYING
FOR PUBLIC RECORDS UNDER THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION
ACT. And thirdly, on House Bill 5278, AN ACT
REVISING CERTAIN ABSENTEE VOTING STATUTES.

We have submitted testimony in opposition to three
bills as well, Senate Bill 234, concerning voter
privacy protections, Senate Bill 239, AN ACT
CONCERNING AUDITING SIGNED STATEMENTS OF ELECTORS
PRIOR TO VOTING, and Senate Bill 241, AN ACT
CONCERNING AUDITING OF ELECTION DAY REGISTRATION.

I'm not going to be speaking about of those bills I
just mentioned, but I would be happy to answer
questions about our positions on them.

As for Senate Bill 233, it has a number of sections that provide for automatic voter registration, voting by people on parole, and changes to election day registration, all of which we support. Automatic voter registration provides more people with the opportunity to participate in elections in Connecticut and we support fair voting systems designed to uphold the cornerstone of our democracy - the right to vote.

AVR has outside benefits for people with disabilities, people who lack transportation, students, and people with unpredictable work schedules, as you have heard from people in those situations today. We look forward to continuing the conversation about thoughtful implementation that protects people who should not be automatically registered once this bill passes.

We also support expanding the vote to people who are on parole. Millions of Americans are disenfranchised because of their criminal records, including all people on parole for felony convictions in Connecticut. This is not only unjust, but also confusing, because as you've heard numerous times, people who are on probation for felony convictions in Connecticut are permitted to vote. Laws that disenfranchise people because of their felony convictions disproportionately disenfranchise black Americans.

It's time for Connecticut to allow people on parole to vote. By passing this bill you would join other New England States, as you have repeatedly heard. It would also bring Connecticut closer to the model by Maine, Vermont and Puerto Rico, which do not

disenfranchise anyone on the basis of their conviction history, including incarcerated people.

And as for election day registration, we support it because it provides more people with the opportunity to participate in elections in Connecticut. Strengthening this option is always a good thing for the state. We support these changes, especially those which Secretary Merrill told us will clarify that anyone in line at 8 p.m. will be allowed to register and vote. To be clear, we believe that current Connecticut law already allows this, but repeated problems in past elections demonstrate that clarification on this point is necessary.

We also applaud the secretary of state for making these changes effective upon passage so that they will go into effect before the November election, which will likely have record turnout. For these reasons, the ACLU of Connecticut supports Senate Bill 233 and we urge this committee to support it as well. Thank you.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you, Ms. Moore, for your testimony. Questions or comments? Can I ask a quick question? I appreciate S. 1 and 233, but I'm just curious, can you just briefly give me the reasoning behind to your support of 234 -- or your opposition to 234 I think you said?

MS. MOORE: Yes. We believe that --

REP. FOX (148TH): You were opposed to that bill, I think?

MS. MOORE: Yes, sir. Our position is based on the restriction against commercial uses, because we believe that publicly available information should be used for any lawful purpose and the government

shouldn't be in the business of saying some purposes are permissible and some are not. While you have heard plenty of arguments today for why commercial purposes can be problematic, we do not think that that is the role of the government when we are talking about lawful uses of information that is publicly available.

What we see as a better solution would to be -- would be to allow voters to opt out of having any of their information disclosed, and we have proposed that this year in our testimony and in previous years when this same suggestion has arisen.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you very much. Any Further questions or comments? I appreciate you being here today. Have a nice weekend. Thank you.

MS. MOORE: Thank you.

REP. FOX (148TH): Next up I have Jillian Lundari, followed by Randy Collins, followed by Wilson Carroll. Good afternoon.

MS. CUNDARI: Good afternoon. First thing, my name is Jillian Cundari.

REP. FOX (148TH): Oh, Cundari. I'm sorry about that.

MS. CUNDARI: A little bit of an error. That's okay. So good afternoon, Chairperson Fox and members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee. I am here to voice my strong support of Senate Bill 233, AN ACT CONCERNING ELECTIONS. Particularly, I support the proposition to restore voting rights to convicted felons on parole without the stipulation of repaying certain fines.

I am a graduate student at UConn, pursuing a dual master's degree in public administration and social work. And as such, I study the intersection of human service policy and clinical practice. For the past eight months, I have interned at a methadone clinic in the greater Hartford area. In my role, I have borne witness to the eviscerating impacts of incarceration on those seeking and sustaining substance use treatment. As of February 15th of this year, 45.5 percent of inmates in the United States were incarcerated due to drug offenses. Most of these individuals return to their communities, and many of them carry the diagnosis of substance use disorder.

They desperately need treatment and so they enter into the care of substance use treatment providers. Many of the clients at the clinic have just returned to their communities from confinement. And on top of battling a substance use disorder, they are also juggling finding housing, work, and medical care, all on a shoestring budget. When your top priority is fulfilling basic needs, the burden of repaying fines is likely not on your mind, and likely neither is voting.

Prior to the midterm election last year, I had the privilege of registering voters at the clinic. Many, unfortunately, were not eligible to vote, being current parolees or having outstanding debts to the state. In a clinic that serves over 600 clients daily, only eleven people were both interested and eligible - just 11. When prompting clients to register, the most common response I received was, I can't, I have a felony. They were astounded to learn they were eligible to vote as felons, assuming they weren't on parole and didn't

have fine debts. I had to turn several people down because of their confinement status as parolees.

These restrictions are prohibitive and prevent citizens from voting for legislators who will vote for laws that impact them. I think specifically now of House Bill 5232, AN ACT CONCERNING A MINIMUM BASE RATE FOR METHADONE MAINTENANCE TREATMENT. To that end, I support the language in Senate Bill 233 that affirms the necessity of proactively informing newly eligible felon voters that they can vote, as many are not aware.

I thank the committee for hearing my testimony and I urge them to uphold Senate Bill 233 in its entirety, owing to the vitality of ensuring everyone has the opportunity to influence the legislative process. Thank you.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you, Ms. Cundari. Any questions or comments? Quick, can you just give me a little information into the -- do you have a process in the clinic to register voters? You said in your testimony you participated in registering voters.

MS. CUNDARI: Yes, I ran a voter registration drive at the clinic.

REP. FOX (148TH): Was that through and individual -- was that through some entity or was that done on your own, or?

MS. CUNDARI: That was of my own volition.

REP. FOX (148TH): And was there interest in the community?

MS. CUNDARI: There was mixed interest. A lot of people saw me and they walked right by. They

thought they couldn't vote. Those who stopped to talk to me and those I was -- those who I were able to engage, many of them were interested, but they had, you know -- I couldn't in good faith encourage them if they weren't positive if they had fines or they weren't sure what their status was at that moment in terms of their confinement.

REP. FOX (148TH): Of course. All right. Thank you very much for your testimony and being here today. Appreciate your time. Have a nice day.

MS. CUNDARI: Thank you.

REP. FOX (148TH): Next up Randy Collins. I don't see -- followed by Wilson Carroll, followed by Eliza Sweren-Becker.

MR. CARROLL: Thank you, Chairman Fox and members of the committee.

REP. FOX (148TH): Good afternoon.

MR. CARROLL: My name is Wilson Carroll and I'm a resident of Hamden. I'm here today as a law student intern on behalf of the Civil Justice Clinic at Quinnipiac. We support S.B. 233, which would restore voting rights to individuals who are on parole. Although this bill is an important step forward, we urge the committee to eliminate a felony disenfranchisement in Connecticut entirely, by restoring voting rights for incarcerated citizens in addition to people who are on parole.

As we've heard today, Connecticut's felony disenfranchisement law is the most restrictive in the Northeast. In both Maine and Vermont; you can take a look at this map here, individuals convicted of felonies never lose their right to vote in those

states, even during their time in prison. In Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Rhode Island, people convicted of felonies have their right to vote restored automatically when they're released. We are the only state in the region that still doesn't allow people on parole to vote.

There is a growing national movement to restore voting rights for prisoners. In 2019, bills eliminating felony disenfranchisement entirely were introduced in nine states including Connecticut. Maine and Vermont already have a functioning system in place. Prisoners register to vote in the towns where they lived before they were incarcerated. They request absentee ballots from the clerks in those towns and receive those ballots at the prison by mail. They fill them out and return them by mail as well.

Here in Connecticut, we use that same absentee ballot system for people who are incarcerated pretrial or serving sentences for misdemeanors. Those individuals also vote in the towns where they lived before they were incarcerated. And I'll turn your attention now to Connecticut General Statutes 9-14a, which reads any person in the custody of the state being held at a community corrections center or a correctional institution whose voting rights have not been denied shall be deemed to be absent from the town or city in which he is an inhabitant for the purposes of voting.

If we restore the right to vote to people who are incarcerated for felonies, it would increase the scale of that absolute ballot -- absentee ballot voting process because the framework is already in

place in Connecticut to handle it. Rehabilitation is best served by treating a person with dignity and fostering their connection and engagement with society. Restoring prisoners' right to vote recognizes that they are still full citizens who are capable of rejoining society in productive ways. Giving those people an opportunity to have a positive, meaningful experience with government institutions is also capable of reducing recidivism.

Voting is the most fundamental right in our democracy. Investing power in the citizens is what makes our government legitimate. In the past, moral, educational, racial and gender-based qualifiers have barred people from voting in this country. Those have all been eliminated. Restoring the right to vote to incarcerated citizens and people on parole benefits society by ensuring that the government stays accountable to the people without qualification.

Restoring the right to vote to people who are incarcerated for felonies does not deny their past wrongdoing. Instead, it allows them to have a meaningful voice in our political process so that they will be prepared to exercise their civic duties when they return to society. Thank you.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you, Mr. Carroll. Any questions or comments for Mr. Carroll?
Representative Blumenthal.

REP. BLUMENTHAL (147TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair. And thanks for your testimony today. You were even within the time limit, and we don't often have that. So, I had a couple of questions for you. First of all, I was wondering if you could speak a little bit about the justifications given for felon

disenfranchisement, both historically and in the present day.

MR. CARROLL: The justifications that have been used for felon disenfranchisement?

REP. BLUMENTHAL (147TH): Correct.

MR. CARROLL: Sure. So, the theories of punishment -- there's two theories of punishment. One is retribution and one is rehabilitation. So, with respect to retribution, I don't think that it actually makes -- with respect to retribution, the people who are incarcerated for felonies are already -- their liberty is entirely deprived. So, they are already being punished severely. And we don't think that there is any justification for extending the punishment to their voting rights.

With respect to rehabilitation, it actually cuts the other way. Allowing people to be engaged in the civic process and having a meaningful opportunity to interact and, like, have a say in our political society actually encourages the rehabilitative goal of punishment. So, I don't think either of those actually, historically or currently, justify felon disenfranchisement.

REP. BLUMENTHAL (147TH): And we've heard at times one justification used is deterrence and -- are you aware of any evidence that depriving people of their right to vote has any deterrence value?

MR. CARROLL: None whatsoever. I think -- and I was thinking about this as I was listening to the testimony today. If somebody is convicted and they realize they're going to prison, I don't think that their loss of their voting right is necessarily the first thing that comes to mind. So, I -- and a lot

of people have this, you know, confusion with respect to probation and parole and incarceration whether those -- whether they have the right to vote in the first place, so I don't think that the deterrent effect, you know, especially compared to the deformation of the liberty interest, is a significant valid-- justification for felonies [INAUDIBLE-05:27:22].

REP. BLUMENTHAL (147TH): And you spoke a little bit about how Maine and Vermont conduct voting even for people who are currently incarcerated. And I was just wondering if they've faced any logistical difficulties in executing that system and if we would anticipate any if we did it here?

MR. CARROLL: Right. So we've actually recently been in contact with some Department of Correction individuals in Vermont, and according to their experience it hasn't. It's been a pretty smooth process. Like I said, we already have the statutory framework in place in Connecticut to at least determine whose responsibility it is and, you know, the process by which people who are incarcerated can vote. And like I said, it would increase the volume, theoretically, of absentee ballots, but as far as additional procedural impediments, I don't think it would be that significant.

REP. BLUMENTHAL (147TH): Thank you very much for your testimony.

REP. FOX (148TH): Any further questions or comments? Thank you for being here today, sir. Appreciate your time. Next up I have Eliza Sweren-Becker, followed by Afebra Ashong, followed by James Jeter. Good afternoon.

MS. SWEREN-BECKER: Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to express my support today for Senate Bill 233, and thank you for your continued attention during this long afternoon. Much appreciated. The provisions of Senate Bill 233, automatic voter registration, reforms election day registration and restoration to people on parole will work together and reinforce one another to reduce confusion and administrative burden for citizens and election officials alike.

I have submitted written testimony in support of the bill, so I will try to be brief today. But, ultimately, the Brennan Center urges each of you to vote to pass this bill out of committee and then to move it to the floor swiftly for a vote.

Turning first to the restoration of voting rights to people on parole, I want to highlight three reasons why we support this provision. First, restoration benefits everyone in Connecticut's communities. As we've heard, civic engagement is a component of healthy reentry and our communities benefit when we encourage citizens to see themselves as a worthy party -- as a worthy part of the large of society. Indeed, studies have shown that civic engagement reduces the risk of reoffending, re-arrest and return to prison. And that's why we've seen law enforcement and organizations like the American Probation and Parole Association and the Association of Paroling Authorities International have passed resolutions in favor of restoring voting rights upon release from prison.

Connecticut's policy of denying eligibility to vote to people on parole is particularly illogical and

confusing because the state has already restored voting rights to people on probation. And Brennan Center studies have shown that few people, including election administrators, know the difference between probation and parole, resulting with -- resulting in confusion at the polls and de facto disenfranchisement, even of people who are eligible. Moreover, the requirement to repay certain court debts for people who have out of state or federal convictions before their eligibility is restored is discrimination on the basis of wealth, and that is a distinction that is unconstitutional under the 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution as has been affirmed very recently by the 11th Circuit in relation to a Florida law.

As you've heard, Connecticut is also out of step with most of the neighboring states rights restoration and indeed the rest of the country. The drumbeat around Connecticut for restoration is growing. In New York, New Jersey, and not just the Northeast, but in states like Kentucky, Florida, Louisiana, Nevada, Colorado, have restored voting rights or eased restrictions in the last several years.

Third and finally, an expanded and inclusive democracy is consistent with American values and a nationwide attention to issues of democracy. We've seen voter turn up go up in recent elections. We've also even seen the U.S. Congress, the House, pass H.R. 1, the For the People Act, which included rights restoration, early last year. I find myself out of time earlier than expected. I'll move on to some of the other provisions of the bill.

REP. FOX (148TH): Please. You're still fine.

MS. SWEREN-BECKER: I wanted to speak also to automatic voter registration, or AVR. We particularly support the form of AVR that is put forth in this bill, which instead of requiring people to opt-in to registration, have an opt-out approach. And that approach is provided at the front end or the point of service at DMV and other agencies.

In addition, we support the opportunity for agencies beyond the DMV to implement AVR and we support the protections provided to noncitizens, which will help prevent ineligible voters from getting registered and improve the accuracy of the rolls. As an added benefit, AVR saves money and time for election's administrators and simplifies the registration process. AVR will also ease election day registration, smoothing out the peaks and valleys that election administrators have to deal with. So, to the extent long lines are a concern because of election day registration, AVR is a perfect complement to EDR.

I will, since I am running out of time, close just by saying that the right to vote forms the core of American democracy. A strong and vibrant democracy requires the broadest possible base of voter participation. Connecticut has the opportunity to strengthen its democracy by restoring the right to vote to those on parole, codifying AVR, and improving EDR. You can and should take the first step by voting to pass Senate Bill 233 out of committee. And again, I'm grateful for the opportunity to speak with the committee today. Thank you.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you very much for your testimony. Questions or comments? Senator Haskell.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Thank you so much for being here today. I have a very basic question that I'm embarrassed I don't know the answer to. I know the Brennan Center engages not just on legislative advocacy, but also on the litigation front. And has Connecticut statutes, specifically that which requires fines be repaid before voting, has that been challenged in court? Because you mentioned that in -- elsewhere that it's been found unconstitutional.

MS. SWEREN-BECKER: Very recently, the Brennan Center was part of a litigation alongside other organizations and coalition, challenging a Florida bill that would condition the restoration of eligibility on the repayment of certain court debts. And a federal district court and then a court of appeals agreed with us that doing so constitutes wealth discrimination in violation of the 14th Amendment because it does not provide those who are unable to afford those court debts the opportunity to have their rights restored.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Got it. And in the case that you mentioned, that is the Florida law that's been challenged, not the Connecticut.

MS. SWEREN-BECKER: Yes. Yeah. But the principle stands that if eligibility is being restored to people; wealth should not be a barrier to that eligibility, and indeed cannot be, under the U.S. Constitution.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): I would agree. Thank you so much. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

REP. FOX (148TH): Further questions or comments? Very quickly. Under the Florida law that you just - - the Florida case; that was within about the past month, I think, give or take? The Florida case; about the past month?

MS. SWEREN-BECKER: Yes.

REP. FOX (148TH): And do you know the underlying piece? Was the fees similar to the Connecticut? Do you know?

MS. SWEREN-BECKER: My understanding is that Connecticut requires people on parole who owe - who were convicted out of state or in federal court to pay off any court debts assigned as part of the convictions in those cases. Whereas in Florida the law requires the repayment of any outstanding fines, fees, costs and restitution. But the principle, I think, applies very broadly that you can't condition eligibility on the repayment of something that someone simply cannot afford to pay.

REP. FOX (148TH): Right. You also made reference in your testimony of people not knowing the difference between probation and parole. Why don't you give me a quick, thirty-second --

MS. SWEREN-BECKER: Sure. The Brennan Center has done some research and I can provide that to the committee, if you'd like, afterwards, particularly with respect to the law in New York, which until recently, in the past two years, was similar to Connecticut under which people on probation could vote, but people on parole were ineligible. And our research showed that something, like, a third of elections officials didn't know the difference between probation and parole and were misinformation

to people about whether they were eligible to vote. And you can imagine that if elections officials who are experts on election law and generally sophisticated about the law overall are -- if they are as confused about the state of affairs, then people who are less familiar with the law are going to be suffering from even more confusion.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you. And I appreciate that information. If you could get it to us it would be great.

MS. SWEREN-BECKER: Absolutely.

REP. FOX (148TH): Any more questions or comments? Representative Blumenthal.

REP. BLUMENTHAL (147TH): Thank you for being here today. And I just wanted to echo some of what you were saying about the confusing nature of our current law. I actually had an experience when I was running in 2018, where I had a potential voter who didn't understand that he couldn't -- that he could register, or whether he could register, and believed he couldn't because he had a felony conviction. And it actually took me, a lawyer, fifteen minutes to print out the statute, close read it, and explain it to him. And I agree with you, I don't think you should need a lawyer to figure out whether you can vote.

MS. SWEREN-BECKER: Amen. The Brennan Center advocates for bright-line policies with respect to rights restoration. A bright-line policy here would be that everyone in the community can vote. That's quite easy for everyone in the community to understand and it's also easy for elections officials to understand and administer.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you. And further questions or comments? Thank you for your testimony. I appreciate you being here. Have a nice weekend. Up next, Aferba Ashong, followed by James Jeter, followed by Charles Logan. Good afternoon.

MS. ASHONG: Good afternoon. Good afternoon, Chairs and members of the committee. My name is Aferba Ashong and I am a resident of Wallingford. And I'm here today to testify on behalf of the Black Law Students Association at Quinnipiac Law School. We submit this testimony in support of S.B. 233, AN ACT CONCERNING ELECTIONS. The bill restores the voting rights of people on parole. We support this reform and urge the committee to amend the bill to end felony disenfranchisement in Connecticut entirely.

Throughout Connecticut's history, the state is -- the state has restricted voting rights on base of race, gender, literacy, English skill -- English language abilities, intellectual capacity, and criminal record. Historically, the neighboring states have moved to expand the franchise and promote equality, while Connecticut has often lagged behind. Connecticut's original 1818 constitution provided that whites only citizens -- provided only that white male citizens over the age of twenty-one, who owned property, paid taxes, or served in the military could vote.

By the start of the Civil War, all New England states had allowed to -- had allowed African Americans to vote. In 1865, following the Civil War and after a contentious debate, the Connecticut General Assembly passed an amendment removing the word white from the Connecticut Constitution. However, the vote was rejected on amendment. It was

not until 1876 that African Americans fully gained the right to vote in Connecticut, six years after the Fifteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution was ratified.

Connecticut was the first state in the country to adopt a literacy requirement in 1855. In 1897, Connecticut added a requirement that voters be able to read in English. These restrictions had a disproportionate impact on recent immigrants and minority voters. The restrictions were finally eliminated by congress with amendments to the federal Voting Rights Act of 1970. At that time, Connecticut was one of the few states that still had these types of restrictions.

Nationwide, one in three African Americans of voting age are disenfranchised as a result of criminal conviction, as compared to one in fifty-six of those who are non-African American. Like felony disenfranchisement laws around the country, Connecticut's felony disenfranchisement law, which strips prisoners and parolees of their voting rights, disproportionately impacts people of color. African Americans and Latinos make up approximately two-thirds of Connecticut's prison population, while non-Hispanic residents in Connecticut represent approximately two-thirds of the state's general population, but only one third of the prison population.

In sum, stripping people of voting rights alienates and stigmatizes them. Instead, Connecticut should welcome participation by all -- by all in our civic institutions. Restoring voting rights provides -- promotes and rehabilitates and reintegrates them into society for those with criminal records.

Ending felony disenfranchisement will promote equality in Connecticut. Thank you.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you. Any questions or comments? Representative Blumenthal.

REP. BLUMENTHAL (147TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair. And thank you for being here today and for your testimony. I don't mean to put you on the spot. You've clearly done a lot of research into Connecticut's voting laws history. And I was just wondering if you had unearthed reasons why Connecticut seems to have lagged behind its neighboring states time and again throughout its history in terms of expanding the franchise to its full population.

MS. ASHONG: In our research, I have not found that information, but I'm happy to, like, research it more and get back to you if you would like.

REP. BLUMENTHAL (147TH): Thank you very much. And I appreciate your testimony. Thanks.

MS. ASHONG: Thank you.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you. Further questions or comments? I have a quick question for you. Earlier in your testimony, you suggested an amendment being made to the bill? Can you just again remind me what the amendment was? So, I think you mentioned early on in your testimony about the bill being amended, I think to allow -- I'm just asking you to clarify your testimony.

MS. ASHONG: Yes. I'm asking that the bill be amended to eliminate felony disenfranchisement as a whole in Connecticut. Right now, the bill is only

to allow parolees to vote and I'm asking for an end to felony disenfranchisement as a whole.

REP. FOX (148TH): So, individuals in prison, such as Maine and Vermont?

MS. ASHONG: Correct.

REP. FOX (148TH): Okay. Any further questions or comments? Thank you for being here today. I appreciate having your testimony, a witness again. Good luck with Representative Blumenthal's homework.

MS. ASHONG: Thank you.

REP. FOX (148TH): Next up is James Jeter, followed by Charles Logan, followed by Garrett Frye-Mason. Good afternoon, Mr. Jeter.

MR. JETER: Good afternoon. Good evening. I thank the Co-Chairs and members of the committee for allowing me to testify in my support for S.B. 233, AN ACT RESTORING ELECTORAL PRIVILEGES TO FELONY CON -- PEOPLE CONVICTED OF FELONIES ON PAROLE IN CONNECTICUT. I am the co-director of the Full Citizen Coalition to Unlock the Vote. I am also a voting rights fellow at the Social Justice Clinic at Quinnipiac Law School. I am Dwight Hall Fellow at Yale for Yale Prison Education Initiative. I am all those things because I was first a 15-84 parolee, a juvenile parolee, who was incarcerated at 17 and spent twenty years in prison before I was released under 15-84.

So, parolee voting is very important to me. I went to prison before I was able to vote and I have thirteen years of parole left. And so, I won't vote until I'm fifty-three years old. The removal of my right to vote presents fundamental and foundational

issues within my citizenship. For that, I believe there's fundamental issues within my community. I have served my time. And we're talking about incarceration. I make the distinction between paroled and incarceration. I've served my time in a manner where I've been granted parole eleven years prior to my discharge.

The fact that I am free negates our arguments of what my rights would and would not be if I was incarcerated simply because I am not incarcerated. To be incarcerated means to be removed from society, to be made a ward of the state in a fashion of total dependence. I earn no money in prison. I pay no taxes. I neither house, clothe or feed myself. AS punitive consequences, the right to vote is revoked for the duration of my incarceration. However, upon my release, I become a productive citizen again, or at least I desire to. I am no longer a ward of the state in the nature of my incarceration and all expectations of being a productive citizen are placed back on me.

I'm an employee, a volunteer and a man about family and community. What hinders my ability, however, to be the fully productive citizen that I desire to be is that, technically, I'm not a citizen. I am legally illegal. I pay taxes into a system that denies me the fundamental right of representation. The inability to vote denies me a place in our society. I have no say on the shaping of my community, no voice in shaping the policy that may send my children to war or prison. I am not heard, in fact, in voice, in the shaping -- wait. Sorry. I'm not heard. In fact, I live in a civic death, which makes me questions how's my humanity seen.

Some may say that they fail to see the connection. But if I cannot vote on what is passionate to me, if I cannot vote for who I believe speaks to me and for me, then my quality of life is jeopardized. And jeopardized illegally because it isn't viewed as a quality of life issue, because my humanity doesn't exist as others exist. This is a fundamental issue because the forefathers of this nation revolted against the practice of taxation without representation, and that the constitution gave me, as a citizen, eventually, inalienable rights.

Once released from prison, taxation begins. The state no longer houses, clothes or feed me, yet I am somehow still their ward. I'm told I'm still a prisoner and forced to accept a new type of three-fifth status. Simply put, the arguments against right restorations are baseless. The notions that bar thousands of system and allow people from the polls in Connecticut and millions across the nation each election are by and large steeped in an antiquated legacy of an exclusionary democracy that taxes all, but rewards only a few.

In New England, we bear witness to the fallacy of anti-enfranchisement arguments in each of our states, but particularly Maine and Vermont. These two states are outliers among outliers in the fact that they have never barred the right to vote to any citizen unless convicted of charges pertinent to voting laws, leaving voting rights open to even those who are in prison and jails. The remaining New England states of Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Rhode Island all are among the nation's most progressive in voter rights restoration, joining just fourteen other states and the District of

Columbia in ensuring that individuals serving time for probation and parole have the right to vote.

There have been no recorded increased claims of voter fraud, and these are the states allowing them to exist as real-time, ongoing models of a more just society where people who live, work and are taxed in the communities to have a say in the way they are governed. It's time that Connecticut joins them. For this reason, I support S.B. 233. Thank you.

REP FOX (148TH): Thank you Mr. Jeter. Any questions or comments for Mr. Jeter? Senator Haskell.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): I have more of a comment than a question. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just wanted to thank you so much. You're the -- at least as I've been in the room and as I've seen the testimony, the first person to mention the issue of taxation without representation, and I think that that's a really valuable perspective. So, thank you very much, sir, for being here and for your patience today.

MR. JETER: Thank you.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you, Senator. Anything further? Representative Blumenthal.

REP. BLUMENTHAL (147TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you, sir, for your testimony today. I was wondering -- it sounds pretty clearly, like, you think that having access to the right to vote would be assistive to rehabilitation of people who were formerly incarcerated?

MR. JETER: It's been proven. So, there have been a few studies done, but one of the most recent studies

shows that having changed no other factors in release, just by restoring the right to vote and simply engaging a population, the recidivism rate was reduce by a third. Like, there's ownership in it that -- it changes how you act in the community. You know, I'm -- for me, the three things that have anchored me is, one, this fight. But two; volunteering in my community and education. So, you know, -- but this is right there with them. It's the way you take back ownership. It's the way you create new engagements with your community.

REP. BLUMENTHAL (147TH): Thank you for that testimony. I have one more question. You, yourself, was formerly incarcerated. You work with a lot of formerly incarcerated people, people who are justice system affected. Has anyone ever spoken to you or have you heard people talking about how being -- they were thinking about potentially being deprived of the right to vote before they became system affected or how that the deprivation of that right would somehow deter them from committing crimes?

MR. JETER: So, you -- so, this is an interesting question. Now, I've had this question come up before, right. So, there is -- I was fortunate enough to work in housing policy for about two years and there was this metric called labor market engagement. It's a fascinating metric. I'm gonna make this fast. The metric says that your everyday interaction with the labor market dictates how you view your -- the possibility of -- what's possible for you in work. And it's not like in visiting a museum or having a career day. It's your parents, your neighbors, your friends, you know.

If everyone works at the warehouse then that's it, right. And so, we're talking about intergenerational disenfranchisement. So, it's hard for a lot of people to even imagine what civic engagement can do for their lives because they haven't seen it. And so, it's like asking do you like crab legs, and they've never had it. Like, I've never thought of eating crab legs. Let's give them some crab legs.

REP. BLUMENTHAL (147TH): Thank you, sir, very much for your testimony. And thank you, Mr. Chair.

REP. FOX (148TH): Any further questions or comments? A quick question about -- you indicated you're still on parole today.

MR. JETER: Excuse me?

REP. FOX (148TH): You said you're still on parole?

MR. JETER: Yes, sir.

REP. FOX (148TH): And you were convicted when you were seventeen?

MR. JETER: Yes, sir.

REP. FOX (148TH): So now you've voted once?

MR. JETER: I've never voted.

REP. FOX (148TH): How did you come about to this cause, that being kind of [INAUDIBLE-05:50:17]?

MR. JETER: Working around policy, housing on local and national levels and food disparity policies and just realizing that the way things are done and who's not in the room and what voices aren't being heard. And then being offered a seat on a housing commission, and realizing that I couldn't take it

because I'm not an electorate. And I started to see the fallout.

REP. FOX (148TH): And I would imagine, although I don't want to put words in your mouth, that you would advocate for a broader bill than the one we have before us? You mentioned 7,000 individuals in your initial -- original testimony which -- so, you'd advocate to make this bill even more broad than it is currently.

MR. JETER: So, in my submitted testimony it also covers the fact that of our incarcerated population, Washington don't have a functional process to vote. I personally think that engaging everyone in the system would be most beneficial for our state. And I know that's a pretty radical thought for Connecticut to think about letting people in prison vote, especially for certain parties, but I promise you, half the prison system is extremely conservative. There's more votes on the other side than people assume. But this is also a large engagement. Like, when you lose your freedom, you really start to grasp what you've lost. And so you have a lot of people in prison who are politically inclined and just don't, you know -- it's a waste to see those who are probably most engaged, not engaged.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you. Anything further?
Representative McCarthy-Vayhey.

REP. MCCARTHY-VAYHEY (133RD): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I know you did give us a chance, but I just had to say how moved I am by what you're saying and the fact that you have shared your lived experience and what that's meant. And what the -- Senator Haskell referenced the taxation piece, but

what you just said about wanting to serve your community and not being able to really struck a nerve. So, thanks for being here.

MR. JETER: Thank you.

REP. FOX (148TH): Representative Phipps.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): Thank you, Chair. Can you speak to what -- if there should be any exceptions made to the law or what should be made or should not be made?

MR. JETER: I personally don't think any exception should be made to the law. Even in states who -- as I said in my testimony, like, you know, voting fraud, in every state -- well, most states that do have any type of carve outs, it's the only carve out. What carve outs do is they marginalize and isolate an already marginalized population. And the last thing you want to do is put people who are wrestling to reacclimate to society further out of the loop. Transitioning from prison to back to society is so hard. The greatest advice I got coming home was from my younger brother, who said, you know, in all your preparation, prepare to be unprepared, right. It's that you just don't know what it's gonna be. And he was right. You know, you don't know how to adjust sometimes. You don't know what's going to be the thing that hinders your progress.

And so to create more barriers just doesn't make any sense. Like, there should be no carve outs. Having a voice isn't just important to the system. The system benefits from more input, but it's also therapeutic, like, it gives you an outlet. It gives you a place to speak and be heard to the barriers.

And, you know, being heard is a vey hard thing. When you don't have the right to vote, you can shout as loud as you want, you're not heard. Your vote is your voice. It's the hands of our citizenship, like; you could pursue life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. You could pursue happiness and never catch it. You're not gonna vote.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): Thank you for that. I want to thank you for your testimony today, but also for a conversation that she shared about the very issue. I also want to say really quickly when we had talked about that carve out and why that was important to not have it. If you don't mind me sharing?

MR. JETER: Not at all.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): Because it opened up my eyes. You said, well, if there's a carve-out there's a good chance that I still wouldn't be able to vote. And that really hit me in my gut and those words are words that I never forgot. So, I wanted to make sure that those -- that my colleagues also knew what you shared with me and that our community does. So, I think I would want everyone to have those butterflies in their stomach too. Because it's very clear that you should be voting. You're probably -- this is -- probably more informed than many of us here in the electorate and that's exactly who should be engaged in the process. So, thank you for your words today.

MR. JETER: Thank you. Thank you, committee.

REP. FOX (148TH): Any further questions or comments for Mr. Jeter? Thank you for your time and testimony today, sir. Appreciate you being here. Next, Charles Logan, followed by Garrett Frye-Mason,

followed by Alvaro Perpuly. Charles Logan? Not seeing him. Garrett Frye-Mason, followed by Alvaro Perpuly, followed by Aleisa Bahri. Good afternoon, sir.

MR. FRYE-MASON: Good afternoon. Greetings, Chair Fox, Ranking Member France, and distinguished member of the GAE committee. Thank you so much for your time. My name is Garrett Frye-Mason, and I am a legislative captain of the Yale College Democrats and the legislative coordinator of Every Vote Counts at Yale.

Today, I am absolutely delighted to be here to express strong and impassioned support for S.B. 233 on behalf of the youth of Connecticut. In 2018, a year where the nation celebrated historic turnout, we still bore witness to a very troubling trend. While youth may have turned out at greater rates than past years, we still had turnout rates that were significantly lower than any other age, at only around thirty percent nationally. With the policies of our future being decided right now in rooms just like this, we really just cannot wait for our generation to grow older to vote and be represented.

Thus, I am excited to support S.B. 233 because I believe that sections one, three, and four will all have positive impacts on developing a stronger and healthier culture of voting in my generation. Not only do I believe that all Americans have a right to vote and that section three of this bill, which will re-enfranchise parolees in Connecticut, is only a tiny, but still necessary step in rectifying the abhorrent racial disparities in our political and electoral systems, I also believe that this bill

will help to develop a stronger culture of voting for youth in underrepresented communities.

According to an abundance of academic research, voting is a habit. If you do it once, you will do it again. And it is a habit that is carefully crafted by those around us, by our friends and by our family. As Mark Franklin of Harvard even stated, the most important thing you can say to parents is to take your kids to the polling place. Currently, however, the disenfranchisement of parolees in Connecticut is greatly harming this necessary habit building.

It leads to habits of nonvoting. It erodes cultures of an engaged citizenry, and in effect, it is a punishment on children for the crimes of the parent. How can children learn to vote and participate if we prevent their parents and communities from doing so? Accordingly, I believe that we must re-enfranchise these voters. Additionally, I support section four, which would expand automatic voter registration's clear introduction to democracy at DMVs, for young people, and also section one, which would increase access to voting and fix polling issues which particularly impact college students. Thank you so much for your time and consideration of this necessary legislation.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you very much. Any questions or comments? I have a quick question, sir. You attend Yale, which I know in the past has been one of the universities highlighted as a potential for initiating an EDR location.

MR. FRYE-MASON: Sure.

REP. FOX (148TH): Can you speak to that as a possibility?

MR. FRYE-MASON: Sure. So, although I am a first year, so I wasn't here for the last election. I know that in the last election, since we don't have -- the school doesn't provide mailboxes for us without paying a fine, getting absentee ballots can actually be very difficult. So, in that election, when our colleges would not accept the absentee ballots, they couldn't vote at home in their election.

So instead of being disenfranchised, they still want their voice to be heard in the government, they had to register in Connecticut through the election day registration. And that led to long lines, which frustrated a lot of students because they're very busy already, as well as just administrative hassle. So, by expanding election day registration, it would greatly improve that situation for college students.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you. You said that you cannot get a mailbox without paying a fee?

MR. FRYE-MASON: Yes.

REP. FOX (148TH): And so there were some students, you think, that didn't get AV ballots because they didn't have a mailbox?

MR. FRYE-MASON: Exactly. So, that year -- we are divided in to fourteen residential colleges. Those fourteen colleges have now said that they will accept absentee ballots since we cannot get these mailboxes without paying, I think it's ninety dollars a year. I don't personally have a mailbox because of the cost. So, they say they will accept them. But in the past they have said it and then

lost them or not really followed through with that promise. So, that chance to register on the day is definitely very vital.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you very much. Any further questions or comments? Thank you for your time today. Oh, Representative Mastrofrancesco.

REP. MASTROFRANCESCO (80TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I apologize, but I just thought of something after you were speaking. Thank you very much for your testimony. Is it your opinion that there should be no waivers, everybody that is in jail should be able to vote?

MR. FRYE-MASON: Well, personally, I'm just testifying on this bill, which is just for parolees. In my personal opinion, I do think everyone should have a right to vote, even those who are incarcerated.

REP. MASTROFRANCESCO (80TH): Even those ones incarcerated. Okay. And has there been any thought at all -- you know, I look at this and I've seen a lot of people come up today, and I understand where you're coming from. And I understand -- bless you for getting your life together. I think it's a wonderful thing. But one thing that we haven't talked about today is the victim. Right? We're here. Everybody's here talking about people on parole should be able to vote, people that are incarcerated should be able to vote. But guess what? Our victims can't vote. Sometimes, to some degree, our victims cannot vote. And what happens?

So, I feel -- I understand what you're saying, but I do get a little frustrated when I hear people coming up. I understand, but we have victims out there and

it is my opinion that if you commit a crime, you should finish it out for whatever it is, if it's on parole. That is the law. It's not that we're not sympathy, but there are victims out there and guess what, some of them could never vote again. And I appreciate it and I understand where you're coming from.

MR. FRYE-MASON: I absolutely agree that what happens to victims is tragic and I'm very, very sympathetic to that. In my opinion, I think with the criminal justice system there are already institutions in place that punish people who do create -- commit these crimes. However, also, if you are incarcerated, you are directly being affected by everything that happens in government through, like, -- there's the Solitary Movement now, which is -- I believe is a form of torture. There's a lot of things that you are incredibly affected by. And not having a say in that at all, I think is a tremendous problem.

REP. MASTROFRANCESCO (80TH): Right. And not having the right to vote is not the end-all for whatever that you've committed. So, that's pretty much it. So, I just wanted to just bring that to your attention. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you, Representative. Further questions or comments? Thank you for your time today. I appreciate you being here --

MR. FRYE-MASON: Thank you so much.

REP. FOX (148TH): Next we'll have Alvaro Perpuly. Good afternoon.

MR. PERPULY: Good afternoon, Chair Fox and Ranking Member France. I have come here today to express my

strong support for Senate Bill 233. This bill inhibits the spirit of American democracy by reducing various votes, one of the most sacred and important duties for Americans. And the right to vote should not be taken lightly given the millions of Americans who have fought for this right and who have really tried to get this right. And this bill takes many important actions to reduce failures to votes, and that is something, especially as young person, is greatly appreciated.

And one especially important part of this bill is restoring, without payment of certain fines, the electoral privileges of convicted felons on parole. And I have spoken to my people on this who have experienced and been through this process, and it's not until I heard the personal stories of certain people that you got the magnitude of what -- how important issue is. One friend of mine told me that his father is -- his father was a convicted felon in the early 2000s who was recently put on parole. And he had served his time and he has a change of heart, not just because of what he experienced, but what he had to put his family through, being disenfranchised.

And my friend has told me that one of the disheartening consequences his father had to face after serving his time was not to be considered worthy enough to partake in this sacred American duty that everyone gets to participate in on election day. He knew he had made mistakes, but he was ready to rejoin American society, and voting is one of those things. And this is not a unique story, as about 4,600 residents of Connecticut are serving as parole, who supposedly rejoined society,

yet are held back from different fines that don't allow them to fully rejoin and recommit to society.

And there is no reason why the greatest democracy in the world should partake in this practice that no other democracy in the world partakes in, including, but not limited to, Austria, Canada, Denmark, that have never disenfranchised prisoner like the United States and Connecticut does. And it's time for Connecticut to abandon this era and move towards a new era, more equitable, access to democratic institutions.

And I'm also here to come and support strongly Senate Constitutional Amendment -- Resolution 15. Early voting in Connecticut would greatly reduce barriers to votes, allowing everyone an opportunity to have their voices heard. And especially as a young person, where many people are busy and don't have time, early voting will allow for those people to have it more accessible to come and vote. In order for any democracy to function, we need a government that has as many people's voices involved in this process as possible. And how do we do that? By implementing policies just like this.

And according to the National Conference of State Legislators, thirty-nine states and the District of Columbia have already allowed in-person early voting and this has seen wide success. Just in 2019, New York, they said wait times were minimal and experience was streamlined. And early voting also increases the opportunity for disadvantaged communities to partake in this voting process. Most often people cite work for not being able to vote and it's important for those people to have multiple

opportunities to go and participate in their civic duty.

And that is why I am in strong favor of this Senate Resolution, as we must put this issue on the ballot box and take the next step forward for a more equitable and accessible democracy. Thank you.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you. Any questions or comments? Briefly, sir, do you think early voting would be popular on campus?

MR. PERPULY: I do think it'll be popular on campus. Usually, for students especially, there'll be one day or two days out of the week that they'll have some time to be free. And I think if early voting is done usually two weeks in advance, there would be a day or two that they would be free and they'll be able to go out and vote as opposed to having it on one day where students may have a test they're studying for, multiple meetings. And I think early voting would give the chance for students to be able to vote on whatever day they have free.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you very much. Any further questions or comments? Thank you for your testimony today. I appreciate you being here. Have a nice day.

MR. PERPULY: Thank you so much.

REP. FOX (148TH): Next up Aleisa Bahri. Michael Bilcher. Justin Farmer, followed by Patrice Collins, followed by Joseph Gaylin. Good afternoon.

MR. FARMER: Good afternoon. Thank you for this opportunity to speak to you all and thank you all for all being here this afternoon/evening. My name is Justin Farmer. I'm a councilman in Hamden. I am

a voter and I'm here to speak in favor of S.B. 233. You all have heard tons of facts and figures from people about the importance of early voting, the ability of restoring voting rights to parolees. So, I'm just gonna give you personal testimony, two different stories.

I've had four people in my family incarcerated. I've had two brothers, a cousin and an uncle. And if it wasn't for their lived experiences I wouldn't have run to represent my community. I wouldn't have decided to be as focused in school. But more importantly, I remember talking to my brother while he was incarcerated and we were talking about all the different things that are going on, and oftentimes he was more informed on what was going on in the world and what was going on in Connecticut and what laws are being passed and how they affected us.

And at the time, he was in Pennsylvania, and he got a postcard that he'd just been transferred from one prison to another. And it said welcome community member of -- I forget what town it was, but it was a small town and it welcomed him and it told him hours of the library and what trash pickup was and other services and amenities that were bestowed to him as a member of the community. And he kind of laughed, but it also -- I could sense some pain in it that he wasn't able to participate. He wasn't really in the community. But it was something that always stuck with me.

To speak about something else, when I ran, I knocked on all the doors in my community and I talked to everyone. There was one man named Mr. Israel and he had struggled with alcoholism for probably the last

twenty years. And growing up, he would always watch the kids at the bus stop. He would always make sure to take care of us. He'd always clean up around the neighborhood and then at night he would struggle with the demons of his past.

And I remember I was going around, knocking on doors, and he asked me what are you doing, like, what are you doing, young blood? What's all the ruckus, what's going on? And I told him that I was running. And he was so excited. And he sobered up for a whole two weeks just so that he can vote for me. He rode a mile and a half to the polling location just so he could have the opportunity to vote for me. But he also -- he almost didn't vote for me because he went a day early and was discouraged and showed up to the polls a day early, and like, oh, man, and he's, like, I'm gonna really try to be there on time. I'm gonna try to do everything that I can.

And I think about these individuals that as they're not voters, oftentimes, whether it's R or Ds, we don't talk to these individuals or we don't have the opportunity to talk to them. Even someone being independent oftentimes will wait on party lines until the general election to make the time to talk to these people, to make sure that we're building connections. Well, we don't allow people to automatically be on the rolls and have the opportunity to engage with them. We're leaving them out of the process. Whether that's willingly or unwillingly, we have to be conscientious of this.

So, we have to make sure that everybody has the opportunity, whether they come from a family that voter advocacy is something most pertinent to them,

or if it's something that is something new to them. Giving them the opportunity to engage with us and inform us, the people who are closest to the problem, are closest to the solution. And if we're not making the priorities to speak with those people, we don't have the tools to do our jobs.

So, I appreciate all that you all do. I know the many hours that you spend and I know that when we come here we do it from a place of love, that we all have things that we hold dear. And we have to make sure that our constituents and our community members who are the advocates and the champions of the issues that affect them every day, that we're giving them the opportunity to speak truth to power and to empower us. So, thank you all and I appreciate it.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you Mr. Farmer. Any questions or comments for Mr. Farmer? No. I appreciate your time today, sir. Thank you for being here.

MR. FARMER: Thank you and safe travels.

REP. FOX (148TH): Next up Patrice Collins. Joseph Gaylin. Betsey Gara. Alicia Alamo. Or Cindy Prizio. Good afternoon.

MS. PRIZIO: Hi, Chair Fox, and all members of the GAE, right? Committee. What everybody else said -- first, let me tell you who I am. My name is Cindy Prizio. I'm with a nonprofit, One Standard of Justice, which is a civil rights, all-volunteer advocacy organization, working to restore the constitutional rights, civil liberties and human dignity of people mandated to register for sexual offenses and their families.

We stand in solidarity with James Jeter, who we just heard from, Unlock the Vote, as we have for the past three years. And all previous testimonies, I guess we have a large collaborative or partner supporting this. We support early voting as a necessity for our Connecticut citizens. But I'm really here today to speak in support of the part of S.B. 233 to correct our voting system to include citizens on parole, thereby correcting this constitutional violation.

Voting is a right in a democracy, not a privilege. If we go further, as we heard one speaker say earlier, to include all disenfranchised people in the state, we would be thrilled. As a member of OSJ I've participated with previously incarcerated individuals, especially those whose lives have been crippled by being placed on the registry. I've listened to their stories; lost marriages, broken relationships, lost jobs, or the difficulty of securing employment and the challenges of finding housing, and educational discrimination.

To add another layer of punishment, for that is what the registry is, and prevent individuals on parole from exercising their constitutional right to vote is both unnecessary and another barrier to their returning to society and taking up the full measure of responsible citizenship. It's time that Connecticut join the rest of New England states and provide the vote to those on parole. One of my biggest concerns here in this building and elsewhere is that if we are moving forward with this part of 233, and I strongly encourage you to push it out of committee, that it would help to dismantle the us versus them mentality.

You know, once you do your sentence -- they're telling us ninety-five, ninety-six percent of people in prisons are returning to their communities. What is greater pride in one's self, one's family, one's state, than their civic responsibility? Their children have been harmed beyond. I asked James, I didn't know about -- if he had any children. And he answered the question for me. You know, we've got our children visiting our loved ones in prisons, whether it be their parents, their siblings, their children, their grandparents, and we need to show them, to teach them that as a society, we can be restored.

My organization believes in a restorative, transformative system which simply says we need to replace the current adversarial legal system with a kinder, gentler way. What better way, like the family that goes to church together, the family that, you know, you raise everybody's civic awareness and civic duty. And you actually go vote together. And I know voting numbers are down. And that's for an organization like mine. You heard from many of the colleges and universities in the room today. It's our jobs as advocates and activists to raise the awareness and get more numbers to the polls.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you very much. Any questions or comments? Give me the name of your organization again.

MS. PRIZIO: One Standard of Justice.

REP. FOX (148TH): Based out of?

MS. PRIZIO: Well, we're -- our -- we are -- our PO box for statewide is in New Canaan.

REP. FOX (148TH): Okay.

MS. PRIZIO: And we've been around at this -- in this building and at the Capitol for about five years now. We helped to oppose the bill where they wanted to put children of nonviolent sexual offenses on a registry beginning at the age of seven years old.

REP. FOX (148TH): Mm-hmm. Thank you for your advocacy and thank you for being here today. Have a nice weekend. Good bye.

MS. PRIZIO: Thank you. I'd be happy to talk about victims, though, to answer the question that the representative raised.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you. Anyone else wishing to testify that has not had the opportunity to do so. Going once --uh-oh, whoops. How are you? I'm doing well. Do you wish to testify? Please, take a seat. Thank you for being here. Please introduce yourself.

MS. ALAMO: Hi. My name's Alicia Alamo.

REP. FOX (148TH): Great.

MS. ALAMO: Thank you for having me here. To the Co-Chair Senator Flexer, Representative Fox, and the esteemed members of the GAE Committee, thank you for allowing me to -- the opportunity to speak about why I support immediately eliminating the unfair practice of denying two currently disenfranchised groups in the State of Connecticut, totally more than seven thousand citizens, the democratic right to vote.

These two groups are people being held in pretrial detention; community corrections centers Whalley

Avenue, North Avenue and the Meadows, who have not been convicted and not currently serving a sentence, but are being held as they await judgment. This group has not technically lost their right to vote in the State of Connecticut and places such as California, Atlanta, Cook Country, Illinois, Washington D.C., Puerto Rico, Vermont, Maine all allow this group access to the ballot through absentee voting and other methods, approximately 4,000 citizens.

The other one is parole, who are -- people who are currently living, working and paying local, state or federal taxes while serving terms of parole. Currently, every New England state except Connecticut, along with New Jersey, New York, Hawaii, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Montana, North Dakota, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania and Utah as well as the District of Columbia allow this group to vote, approximately 4,000 -- I mean, 4,000 citizens.

I was twenty-three years old when I was incarcerated and sentenced to eight years in prison. Though I was eligible for five years to vote, I hadn't voted. In fact, I never thought of voting because I didn't know anyone who actively partook in our system. What I realize now is that in a large part of the reason people don't vote now days is because they actively partook in our system. And also what I realized, not as a -- I agree with part of these reasons people did not around me is because they have records and were systematically involved still and either couldn't vote or did not know they had the right after parole.

The consequences just left me and many like me completely disengaged in civic duties and rights.

When I came home, I was determined never to return to prison and to make sure that I was the last in my family to see the inside of a prison cell. As I now home -- now, I'm a homeowner, a wife and a mother of a four-year-old, I see the effects of not voting and understand how keeping people locked out harms the future generation of people who grew up in black and brown neighborhoods as myself, where I grew up at.

I discharged parole in March 2010. I became a mother in 2015. I take my son to -- with me, to the polls with me, something that my mom never did when I was a kid because of her contact with the prison system. I may have been off of parole for almost ten year now, yet I'm here because as I use I know there are a lot of little girls like myself, when I was a kid, that didn't know how to go to a ballot and vote and know that we have rights. I'm sorry.

The effect of keeping people locked out is greater than the people locked out. It is the locking out of their families and the communities. Simply, my arguments against rights restoration are baseless. The notions that bar thousands of system-involved people from the polls in Connecticut and millions across the nation, each election are by and large stepped in an adequate legacy of exclusionary democracy that taxes all, but rewards only a few.

In New England, we bear witness to the fallacy of anti-enfranchisement arguments in each of our states, but particularly Maine and Vermont. These two states are among outliers in the fact that they have never barred the right to vote to any citizen unless convicted of charges to voting laws, leaving voting rights open even to those that are in prison and jails. New England states -- remaining New

England states, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Rhode Island are among the nation's most progressive in voters' restoration rights, joining just fourteen other states and the District of Columbia in ensuring that individuals serving terms of probation and parole have the right to vote.

There have been no recorded increased claims of voter fraud in these other states, allowing them to exist as real-time, ongoing models of most just societies with people who live, work and taxed in their communities can have a say in the way they are governed. It's time that Connecticut joined them. For these reasons, I support to unlock the vote.

Thank you, Alicia Alamo.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you very much, Ms. Alamo. Any questions for Ms. Alamo? Can I ask you a quick question if I can?

MS. ALAMO: Yes, ma'am -- I mean, sir.

REP. FOX (148TH): Where'd you serve your time? Here in Connecticut?

MS. ALAMO: I served my time York Correctional Institution.

REP. FOX (148TH): Upon being discharged, what information were you provided or were you given anything about your eligibility to vote upon discharged or anything of that nature?

MS. ALAMO: No, sir. When I was released, I was released to Bridgeport Halfway House. My job actually as -- I was working as a manager at Auto Zone and they asked me was I voting, and I'm, like, I don't know if I can vote. And I went to find out and I couldn't vote because I was on parole. So,

I'm like, well, I guess I can't vote. So, when I came back to Harford, I started looking into it some more and then I started working on the registrar office for Olga Vasquez. And I learned that parole -- people on parole can't vote at all, which is crazy.

Because if I'm able to pay taxes for whether it is property or whatever the case may be, why can't I have my full rights? So, if I can't vote, I don't have to pay taxes. I mean, it's not logical, but. You understand what I'm saying? Like, if you want my tax money, why I can't have my full rights? It's not gonna hurt anyone. People on probation vote. What's the difference? And then those who are held in lockup with no sentence, you know, why they can't vote?

REP. FOX (148TH): How long have you been off parole now?

MS. ALAMO: I've been off parole for ten years.

REP. FOX (148TH): Have you missed an election yet?

MS. ALAMO: No, I go. I bring my son with me when I go. I want him to learn that voting makes a difference, especially within our community, because it starts there. It don't start from the top. It starts from local, and then from local it moves up. A lot of people think different. They think that the votes that matter is the president elections. All matters because I want to know who is gonna be spending my money. Right? I pay taxes and I want to know that the people that are elected are for the people. But we're all people. So, people on parole should be able to be able to have the right to parole -- to vote while on parole.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you very much for being here today. Any questions or comments for Ms. Alamo? Thank you again for your testimony. I appreciate you being here. Have a nice weekend.

MS. ALAMO: Thank you. Have a good day.

REP. FOX (148TH): Anyone else here wishing to testify? Going once, going twice. I now declare this public hearing closed. Thank you for your time.