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*For immediate distribution*

## Coalition of Organizations Inform Lawmakers That Electors Are Locked Out at the Ballot

Hartford, CT. – A coalition of organizations, including the ACLU of CT, League of Women Voters of CT, Common Cause of CT, Greater New Haven NAACP, and Full Citizens Coalition to Unlock the Vote, concerned with the integrity of elections is set to convene an informational forum for legislators and staff in the Legislative Office Building in Hartford on Tuesday, May 6<sup>th</sup> to educate lawmakers on proposed bill, [HB 7229](#), that would facilitate the ability of the Secretary of the State and the Department of Corrections to provide absentee ballots to people in state custody who have a right to vote.

“The state has a constitutional obligation to ensure that electors in state prison custody can cast a ballot,” said Avery Gilbert, Director of the Civil Rights Advocacy Clinic at Yale Law School. Pre-trial detainees and incarcerated persons convicted of a misdemeanor do not lose their right to vote under Connecticut law. Three years ago the Arthur Liman Center for Public Interest Law conducted a survey that demonstrated that only 2.9% of eligible incarcerated voters who wanted to vote were able to do so.

James Jeter, Director of the Full Citizens Coalition to Unlock the Vote, explained, “For far too long people detained before trial or serving time for misdemeanors have been unable to cast a ballot because it is too difficult to access an absentee ballot application from behind bars. This bill would simply allow the Department of Corrections to provide absentee ballot applications to eligible electors. No, it doesn’t go all the way to ensuring that those absentee ballot applications are actually provided, or that they can be mailed, or that the voter is able to receive an absentee ballot, complete it, and mail it back to be counted, but it is a start.”

“The impact of being locked out of the franchise is disproportionately felt by communities of color. That impact is reflected in everyday things, like school funding and the quality of public services in communities,” says Doris Dumas, of the Greater New Haven NAACP.

Former State Rep. Alex Knopp, Board member of Common Cause CT and former co-chair of the Government Administration & Elections Committee, stated: “The CT Department of Corrections, the State Elections Enforcement Commission and a state Superior Court judge already approved a consent decree in 2016 to resolve an individual’s complaint brought by an incarcerated eligible voter during the 2014 state election and this new legislation would apply the same previously-approved procedures system-wide.”

“Secretary of the State, Stephanie Thomas deserves a lot of credit for working behind the scenes to work out the cooperative procedures in the draft legislation with the state Department of Corrections and to obtain added funding to prepare the specialized application forms for an absentee ballot from an inmate,” Knopp added.

Tanya Rhodes Smith, Director of the Nancy A. Humphreys Institute for Political Social Work, explained: “This urgent issue affects every resident of Connecticut. There is a high correlation between poverty and lack of voter participation. Conversely, communities that vote in higher rates are better off in nearly every measure of health and economic well-being. The act of voting is even associated with significantly lower rates of recidivism. Therefore, promoting civic engagement, especially the fundamental act of voting, while a person is incarcerated, gives us the opportunity to strengthen community ties, public safety, and community outcomes.”

Jennifer Dayton, spokesperson for the League of Women Voters of CT, concerned with the integrity of elections, added: “The more people who participate in elections the stronger our representative democracy becomes. Indeed, the greatest distortion in our political process is not from people fraudulently voting, but from the vast numbers of people who feel locked out of the process and don’t vote.”

The informational forum will be held in Room 1E of the Legislative Office Building. Speakers include Connecticut Secretary of State, Stephanie Thomas; Representative Matt Blumenthal, Co-Chair of the Government Administration and Elections Committee; Kyle Giddings, Deputy Director of the Colorado Criminal Justice Reform Coalition, and James Jeter, Executive Director of the Full Citizens Coalition to Unlock the Vote.

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