

Name: John Ling

Email: john.ling@uconn.edu

Major: Mechanical Engineering

Expected Graduation Date: May 2022

Availability to Attend the hearing: I can attend the hearing

Activities at UConn:

- VSO: Past Treasurer, Current Vice President
- AI club

Why did you choose UConn?

- Reputation of being a military-friendly university with strong educational supports for veterans like myself
- Value of education

Hometown

- Brooklyn, NY

Good morning. Thank you for the opportunity to share about my experiences as a veteran student at UConn. From 2004 to 2008, I served in the United States Marine Corps as an infantryman with several deployments, including one tour in Iraq. Upon leaving the Marines and returning home to Brooklyn, New York, I felt lost. I struggled with the transition to the civilian world, feeling that I did not have a place in this world. I used my post-9/11 GI benefits to attend a college in New York and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Criminal Justice. But even after graduating, I was unable to find myself. I spent the following years in and out of various jobs during this time which included a move to Connecticut with my fiancé. Seeing that I had not yet found a career that was a good fit for me, she and close others encouraged me to return to school to discover my purpose. I saw that UConn was a solid university within a half hour drive of our home. After being accepted into their Bachelor of Science in mechanical engineering program in the fall of 2018 and with support from the VA's Voc rehab program, I saw an opportunity to transform my military experience with defense systems and my hobby of tinkering into a life-long career in engineering.

I was introduced to the Veterans Affairs and Military Program (VAMP) office of UConn. The VAMP office has played a key role in facilitating my transition back to school. As a new student, I was very impressed that their office helped me navigate the Voc Rehab program. They not only ensured that the paperwork was processed in a timely manner, but also personally checked in and communicated with me throughout the process. The office also facilitated the paperwork that was required to register for school and assisted with additional paperwork. Through the VAMP office I was able to establish timely communication with my Voc Rehab Counselor. I recall when once there was a billing issue between UConn and the VA. The VAMP office was able to fix my account at UConn, and served as the intermediary to resolve the issue. The VAMP office is what ensures that student veterans like me have a smooth transition into the university, even if it has been years since they last stepped foot onto a college campus.

The VAMP office has also provided multiple spaces for student veterans to convene together including dedicated study rooms, including the space known as the "Oasis." The location of that space in the Student Union symbolizes how much the VAMP office and UConn

value veteran students. Entering as an undergraduate majoring in engineering, I initially struggled to learn the material. It wasn't until I was in the "Oasis" where I met other veterans who were in the same major as I was. They were able to tutor me and assist me, which helped me succeed in my classes.

The "Oasis" also represented a space for me to relieve my stress. This space was provided so that we can engage with other veterans. We were able to talk to each other in an environment where there was no judgement. This space was a place for us to meet our peers. I am an older student who would have struggled to relate to many of my traditional classmates due to my age and experience. Without the support from VAMP and spaces they provide, I will not have been successful in my studies.

Having worked with veterans and military programs at other colleges and universities, I can say with confidence that the tremendous support that I received from the VAMP office at UConn is unsurpassed. The support for veterans like me is unique to UConn.

So, I'm here today to share my story because I want to let you know that it is imperative that UConn continues to offer these services. These services are the reason why I had another opportunity in life to learn and be part of a community.