

University of Connecticut
Veteran Student Organization (VSO)

Rm 224 Student Union "The Oasis"
337 Mansfield Road, Unit 1264
Storrs, CT 06269

uconnstorrveterans@g
860-



March 3rd, 2016

Good afternoon Senator Mae Flexer, Representative Jack Hennessey, ranking members, and esteemed members of the Veterans' Affairs Committee:

My name is Samuel Surowitz and I'm a veteran. I am testifying in support of Senate Bill 287. I served on active duty from 2007-2011, and as an Army Ranger I experienced combat in Iraq and Afghanistan before deploying to the African continent. Since then I have been an army reservist, and I currently serve in the position of Drill Sergeant. In the scope of my duties I provide training to recruits of the Connecticut State National Guard. I'm currently the president of the University of Connecticut Veteran Student Organization and a senator in the UConn Undergraduate Student Government – the only veteran member of this organization. I speak on behalf of student veterans and myself, and my testimony is not intended to represent the military's viewpoint in any way.

UConn already offers the Combat Veteran Tuition waiver year round, including summer and winter sessions. This benefit has been invaluable to student veterans at UConn. The ability to take classes during these summer and winter extension programs increases veteran's opportunities to complete their degrees on time. This is a challenge for many veterans who return to school after years away and experience the additional burdens of attending school while also providing for their families. Many military students transfer to universities with a grab bag of credits from military training and community colleges they have attended at various duty stations while in service. Their previous credits often don't contribute towards the requirements of their degree programs. The ability to take the summer and winter courses with the waiver has been an essential tool in allowing them to achieve degree completion. UConn has lead the way with the expansion of the Veteran Combat Tuition waiver to cover summer and winter session extension fees and the passing of this bill will provide the same opportunity to our veteran brothers and sisters at other state colleges and universities.

Members of the Connecticut State National Guard deserve access to these same benefits. Last weekend I put on my Drill Sergeant hat and trained some of the CT State National Guard recruits, teaching them the basics such as marching and physical fitness. I see in them the best men and women this state has to offer. They are asking for no handouts and are willing to earn their keep with blood, sweat, and tears. They will be the ones who come to our aid in a natural disaster or defend us in times of war. They are even willing to lay down their lives in the nation's defense.

SB 287 An Act Concerning Tuition and Fee Waivers for Veterans and Members of the Connecticut National Guard at Public Institutions of Higher Education.

Samuel Surowitz

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Members of the National Guard are subject to the same hardships of conventional military when they are called to duty. Contrary to popular belief, their yearly training is often longer, sometimes much longer, than two weeks. It often doesn't take place in the summer either. Although the current National Guard waiver provides a great benefit, men and women in the Guard may be unable to use the benefit if called to duty during the traditional fall and spring semesters. This bill fixes that problem.

In summary, this bills provide a solution to an educational hardship experienced by veterans and National Guard. It shows that Connecticut takes the lead in caring for veterans and doesn't simply look to the federal government for answers. The benefits provided by this bill are just one more reason for veterans and citizen soldiers alike to remain in Connecticut and contribute to this great state's society and economy. This bill is a small investment in Connecticut's future that will pay dividends.

SB 287 An Act Concerning Tuition and Fee Waivers for Veterans and Members of the Connecticut National Guard at Public Institutions of Higher Education.