"There is no greater calling than to serve your fellow men. There is no greater contribution than to help the weak. There is no greater satisfaction than to have done it well. The sole meaning of life is to serve humanity." These words by Walter P. Reuther, a visionary leader in economic and social reform, resonate deeply with me. Though I only recently encountered this quote, I have lived my life in alignment with this philosophy. From an early age, I was called to serve, and throughout my life, I have prioritized the needs of others.

I served in the United States Navy for fifteen years, two months, and three days, an experience that solidified my commitment to service. In this role, I focused on supporting and leading others, believing that the success of those I led reflected my own. I worked to build community connections, whether through small tasks like painting houses, managing a nonprofit, or writing policies to encourage community engagement at Navy commands. However, my military career was cut short due to service-related medical conditions, and I was honorably discharged.

Though my time in active service ended, my dedication to service did not. As a 100% Disabled Veteran, I faced the challenge of reconciling my desire to continue helping others with the limitations imposed by my health. Initially, I pursued a degree at Tidewater Community College, focusing on a field related to my hobbies: plants and aquatics. But I soon realized that this path did not fulfill my deeper need to serve others. I became increasingly concerned with the challenges posed by our evolving digital culture, particularly the rise of cyber threats, scams, and identity theft that have affected me, my friends, and my family. The desire to defend people from these harms became my new calling.

This realization led me to pivot my focus to cybersecurity. I graduated from Tidewater Community College with an Associate of Applied Science in Cybersecurity in December 2023. Just a year and a half later, I will be graduating with a Bachelor of Science in Cybersecurity from Old Dominion University, Spring 2025. This journey has not been without its challenges. Despite the field's reputation for practically zero unemployment, breaking into cybersecurity has proven to be difficult. Many employers require 1-3 years of experience for entry-level positions, which creates a paradox, how can one gain true experience without an entry-level role? My military background, technical expertise, active Department of Defense Secret Clearance, and CompTIA Security+ CE certification have equipped me with valuable skills, but I continue to face the barriers to entry that so many in the field experience.

Rather than waiting for an opportunity to "break in," I am choosing to further my education, certification, and skills. Pursuing a graduate degree in cybersecurity is the next step in my path to overcoming these challenges. I am committed to continuing my personal and professional growth while addressing these barriers, and I am confident that Old Dominion University, a National Center of Academic Excellence in Cybersecurity, is the ideal place for me to do so.

With a background in service and a clear mission to defend others in cyberspace, I am eager to deepen my expertise and contribute meaningfully to the cybersecurity field. I look forward to the opportunity to gain experience from the distinguished faculty at Old Dominion University and further my commitment to service, in a new and ever-more vital arena.