

*The Board of Supervisors of
Contra Costa County, California*

In the matter of:

Resolution No. 2022/344

In the matter of supporting the local, state, and federal efforts to exonerate the Port Chicago 50

WHEREAS, on July 17, 1944, there was a large waterfront munitions explosion at the Port Chicago Naval Magazine which killed more than 320 sailors, over 200 of whom were African American; and

WHEREAS, the explosion also injured 390 others, including 226 African American enlisted men; and

WHEREAS, before the explosion, these men were working significant hours with munitions continuously being loaded despite little to no training; and

WHEREAS, the specific cause of the explosion was never officially determined by a court of inquiry, and the blame was placed on the shoulders of the men who died in the explosion; and

WHEREAS, when ordered to return to loading ammunitions, over two hundred sailors refused to return to work due to the unsafe working conditions; and

WHEREAS, these sailors courageously advocated for safety for themselves and others by requesting adequate training and equipment before returning to work, and in response, the Navy identified fifty Black sailors as the leaders of the organized action; and

WHEREAS, the Navy charged these individuals with mutiny, and this decision resulted in one of the most significant mutiny trials in U.S. military history; and

WHEREAS, the fifty sailors were supported by then NAACP Chief Counsel Thurgood Marshall who through the press raised the racist nature of the trial and called into question the Navy's segregationist policies; and

WHEREAS, this trial was a major catalyst for the United States Navy to desegregate following the war; and

WHEREAS, the outcome of the trial wrongly convicted the Port Chicago 50 of mutiny, and they were sentenced to prison; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Marshall's appeal of their convictions was officially denied; and

WHEREAS, there have been several attempts over the years to appeal the decision, but all have failed; and

WHEREAS, starting in the 1990s, Congressman George Miller worked to preserve the history of the Port Chicago 50 and worked towards their exoneration, and in 1992, his legislation designated the site of the Port Chicago Naval Magazine as a national memorial, which is managed by the National Park Service; and

WHEREAS, the East Bay Regional Park District received part of the Concord Naval Weapons Station through a Public Benefit Conveyance on July 19, 2019, and has named the park the Thurgood Marshall Regional Park – Home of the Port Chicago 50, which honors the courage and legacy of the Port Chicago 50 and all those who sacrificed their lives in our nation's ongoing struggle for social justice, racial equality, and workers' rights; and

WHEREAS, in 2022, Congressman Mark DeSaulnier (CA-11) successfully passed a measure that would direct the Secretary of the United States Navy to publicly exonerate the Port Chicago 50, and this effort was included in the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) (H.R. 7900) which passed the U.S. House of Representatives by a vote of 329-to-101.

Now, therefore, be it resolved that the Board of Supervisors of Contra Costa County does hereby support these and all efforts to exonerate the Port Chicago 50 and recognize their service to our country; and

Now, be it further resolved that the Board of Supervisors recognize the efforts that this case presents in our nation's struggle for social justice, racial equity, and workers' rights.

KAREN MITCHOFF
Chair, District IV Supervisor

JOHN GIOIA
District I Supervisor

CANDACE ANDERSEN
District II Supervisor

DIANE BURGIS
District III Supervisor

FEDERAL D. GLOVER
District V Supervisor

I hereby certify that this is a true and correct copy of an action taken and entered on the minutes of the Board of Supervisors on the date shown.

ATTESTED: October 11, 2022

Monica Nino, County Administrator

By: _____, Deputy