

June 13, 2022

The Honorable Dianne Feinstein
331 Hart Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Alex Padilla
112 Hart Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jack Reed
Chairman, Armed Services Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Adam Smith
Chairman, Armed Services Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator Feinstein, Senator Padilla, Chairman Reed and Chairman Smith

We are writing to request your support for language in the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2024 that would exonerate 50 Black sailors who were charged with mutiny after a munitions explosion at Port Chicago Naval Magazine in Concord, California. Last year's House NDAA bill included a provision expressing the Port Chicago 50 should be exonerated of any charges brought against them in the aftermath of the deadliest home front explosion during World War II. **The Senate should include the same provision in their version of the NDAA bill or support this year's House provision in conference.**

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 Black, and injured 390 others. Days later, many sailors refused to return to work due to the unsafe working conditions that contributed to the explosion. Fifty Black sailors courageously refused to resume loading munitions until their safety could be assured with adequate training and equipment. Their actions resulted in one of the most significant mutiny trials in U.S. military history. The fifty sailors (called the Port Chicago 50) were supported by then NAACP Chief Counsel Thurgood Marshall who raised in the press the racist nature of the trial and called into question the Navy's segregationist policies. The Port Chicago 50 were wrongly convicted of mutiny. They were sentenced to 15 years of prison and hard labor. They also received dishonorable discharges. Following the guilty verdict, Thurgood Marshall began a national campaign to spread the word about the disaster and the fifty sailors who were wrongly convicted. His advocacy gained the support of First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt and brought much-needed attention to the injustices of segregation. Though his appeal of their convictions was officially denied, just one month later, on February 27, 1946, the Navy became the first branch of the military to integrate.

During and after the trial, questions were raised about the fairness and legality of the court-martial proceedings. The United States Navy reconvened the courts-martial board in 1945. Unfortunately, the board failed to reverse the decision. This discrimination of African Americans and other race-related Navy protests of 1944-45 led the Navy to change its practices and initiate the desegregation of the armed forces. Disturbingly, however, the brave men of the Port Chicago 50 have yet to be exonerated.

Board of Directors

Colin Coffey
President
Ward 7

Beverly Lane
Vice-President
Ward 6

Dennis Waespi
Treasurer
Ward 3

Elizabeth Echols
Secretary
Ward 1

Dee Rosario
Ward 2

Ellen Corbett
Ward 4

Ayn Wieskamp
Ward 5

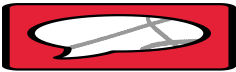
Sabrina B. Landreth
General Manager

In 1994, the National Park Service's Port Chicago Naval Magazine National Memorial was dedicated to the lives lost in the disaster.

The memorial serves as the final resting place for the sailors who died. It is located on the waterfront where the explosion occurred. Inland from the memorial, the Thurgood Marshall Regional Park – Home of the Port Chicago 50 covers 2,500 acres. The regional park will honor 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 and racial equality. The inland former Naval property was transferred to the East Bay Regional Park District through a Public Benefit Conveyance on July 19, 2019

The bravery of these men directly led to the desegregation of the armed services and is now viewed as a catalyst for the civil rights movement. As the civil rights movement forced our nation to correct the errors of our past, it is time to exonerate the fifty men whose bravery led to a more just and inclusive military. We stand in support of including exoneration language in the National Defense Authorization Act to reclaim their legacy and denounce the injustices of racial segregation. The Park District appreciates your leadership on many pressing issues facing the nation. We look forward to working with you to exonerate the Port Chicago 50. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



Sabrina B. Landreth
General Manager

CC: EBRPD Board of Directors
Vice President Kamala Harris
Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin
Navy Secretary Carlos Del Toro
Representative Mark DeSaulnier
Representative Barbara Lee

FY23 House NDAA
Agreed to by voice vote

AMENDMENT TO RULES COMMITTEE PRINT 117- 13
OFFERED BY MR. DESAULNIER OF CALIFORNIA

At the end of subtitle G of title X, insert the following:

1 SEC. 10 __. SENSE OF CONGRESS REGARDING THE PORT
2 CHICAGO 50.
3 It is the sense of Congress that—
4 (1) the American people should recognize the
5 role of racial bias in the prosecution and convictions
6 of the Port Chicago 50 following the deadliest home

7 front disaster in World War II;

8 (2) the military records of each of the Port Chi-
9 cago 50 should reflect such exoneration of any and
10 all charges brought against them in the aftermath of
11 the explosion; and

12 (3) the Secretary of the Navy should upgrade
13 the general and summary discharges of each of the
14 Port Chicago 50 sailors to honorable discharges.