



BERKELEY CITY COUNCILMEMBER
TERRY TAPLÍN
 DISTRICT 2

25

CONSENT CALENDAR
 July 8, 2025

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Councilmember Terry Taplin

Subject: Port Chicago Alliance: Relinquishment of Council Office Budget Funds from General Funds and Grant of Such Funds

RECOMMENDATION

Adopt a Resolution approving the expenditure of an amount not to exceed \$500 per Councilmember, including \$500 from Councilmember Taplin, to support the Port Chicago Alliance in celebration and execution of Port Chicago Remembrance Weekend.

FISCAL IMPACTS OF RECOMMENDATION

No General Fund impact. \$500 is available from contributing Councilmember's Council Office Budget discretionary accounts.

BACKGROUND

In July of 1944, at the Port Chicago Naval Magazine near Concord, California a massive explosion destroyed two ships, killed 320 people, 202 of whom were African American sailors, and injured nearly 400 others. The cause of the explosion was never definitively determined, but it highlighted the dangerous and racially discriminatory conditions under which Black sailors were forced to work. These sailors received no formal training in handling explosives and were often assigned the most hazardous duties without proper safety precautions.

In the days after the explosion, surviving Black sailors were ordered to return to the same unsafe loading operations. Two Hundred and Fifty-Eight of them initially refused, citing fear for their lives. The Navy labeled it an act of insubordination. Most of the men eventually returned to duty under threat of punishment, 50 sailors remained steadfast in their refusal. They were arrested and charged with mutiny. To this day, it stands as the largest such case in U.S. naval history.

Of the 258 men, 208 were charged with refusing orders. 206 of them were convicted. The 50 men who refused to work in the unsafe conditions, were tried and convicted in a military court, receiving sentences of 8 to 15 years of hard labor. These men became known as **The Port Chicago 50**. The trial was widely criticized for its racial bias and lack of due process. Future Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, then an attorney for the NAACP, observed the trial and condemned it as a miscarriage of justice. The event drew national attention to the racial segregation and inequities in the U.S. military.

The disaster and protest had long-term consequences. It spurred public outcry and helped catalyze efforts to desegregate the armed forces. In 1946, the Navy began to integrate its ranks,

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and in 1948, President Harry S. Truman issued Executive Order 9981, formally ending segregation in the military. In 1999, President Bill Clinton pardoned one of the sailors, Freddie Meeks.

On July 24th 2024, 80 years after the catastrophe, the United States Navy exonerated all 258 men who had been considered for mutiny charges.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE IMPACTS

No environmental impacts.

CONTACT PERSON

Terry Taplin, Councilmember, Council District 2, (510) 981-7120

Attachments:

1: Resolution

Port Chicago Alliance

RESOLUTION NO. ##,###-N.S.

AUTHORIZING THE EXPENDITURE OF SURPLUS FUNDS FROM THE OFFICE EXPENSE ACCOUNTS OF THE MAYOR AND COUNCILMEMBERS FOR A GRANT TO PROVIDE PUBLIC SERVICES FOR A MUNICIPAL PUBLIC PURPOSE

WHEREAS, Councilmember Taplin has surplus funds in his office expenditure account (budget code 011-11-102-100-0000-000-411); and

WHEREAS, a California non-profit tax exempt corporation Port Chicago Alliance seeks funds in the amount of \$500 to provide the following public services: Port Chicago Remembrance Weekend; and

WHEREAS, the provision of such services would fulfill the following municipal public purpose: supporting the continued memory and impact of the actions the city plays in regional and national civil rights;

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Council of the City of Berkeley that funds relinquished by the Mayor and Councilmembers from their Council Office Budget up to \$500 amount per office shall be granted to Port Chicago Alliance to support the Port Chicago Remembrance Weekend

