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Port of Los Angeles
425 South Palos Verdes Street
San Pedro, California 90731

RE: Statements on Preservation of Terminal Island Historic Buildings

My name is Joseph Mendez; I am an educator in the Los Angeles Community College District and a member of the American Federation of Teachers and the LA/LB Harbor Labor Day Parade Committee. I was born and raised in Wilmington California, as were my mother, grandmother and great grandmother who settled here in 1906. She like her daughter and my mother worked at the canneries on Terminal Island. My father worked at the many shipyards once located on the Island. Like the many American Japanese, Mexicans, Italian and Slovak families this was home. This was a part of our history and made us what we are today, including a thriving port providing many jobs and being the gateway to international trade. The rich history of the American labor movement from dockworkers to oil workers and the many others unions represented many of these workers on Terminal Island.

I often visit Terminal Island to reminisce of what once was, and to give tours to family and friends who have no idea that there is a Japanese Memorial to those that live on the island and worked in the canneries. Sadly time has forgotten this place and its rich history hidden away in time. Some have no idea of what was once home to many people and now only home to shipping containers. Hidden away today is Fish Harbor now a quite sanctuary for a few fishing boats, sea lions, sea birds, including, yes, descendants of many cats from the old canneries.

Part of this history is the old buildings once filled with the many voices of workers of the past. Remnants of old Tuna street buildings once filled with people on lunch break and shopping at the general store. The pubs once filled with old fisherman telling the stories that one can only imagine would rival Moby Dick and the Oldman and the Sea. Perhaps had John Steinbeck lived here and wrote a book of Terminal Island and its people it would be filled with romance and adventure like that of old Monterey and Cannery Row.

Today, I ask this Harbor Commission to do everything in your power to preserve a natural and real historic site and to develop a long-term preservation plan for this historic place, so that everyone will experience and learn of this rich history and those that worked and gave so much to what we have today. We are all here today ready and willing to give back our time and effort in helping you develop this plan and preserve a part of American history.

Thank you


Joe Mendez