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**May 9, 2024****Chair Castellanos, Board of Port Commissioners****Unified Port District****3165 Pacific Hwy****San Diego, CA 92101**

Chairman Castellanos and Commissioners,

In our present air quality crisis, less than 1% of the planet has clean air to breathe, and communities of color with suppressed incomes consistently bear a higher pollution burden from cars and trucks. National City, where 90% of Westside residents are Latine and almost a quarter lives below the poverty level, is no exception. Children's asthma hospitalization rates in National City are more than double the county average, and the percentage of low birth weight is higher than 84% of California. Research has found that fine particulate matter from on-road vehicles disturbs fetal development, resulting in lower birth weights, preterm births, and fetal and infant mortality.

Parks, playgrounds, and greenery support community resilience in improvements to mental and physical health, social cohesion, and fewer deaths by reducing exposure to pollutants, noise, and excessive heat. Mixed-use zoning that prioritizes industry has deprived National City residents of those benefits, with less Bayfront access than any other member city. National City has the fewest parks by acre and the lowest level of Port funding per capita. Of the National City Marina District's 60 acres, residents only have access to green space on less than 2 percent of that acreage at Pepper Park. Residents have fought for nearly ten years for funding to expand and improve Pepper Park, and they are still waiting.

The Port completed the Rady Shell venue in Embarcadero Marina Park South in half that time, at a cost four times larger than the anticipated \$22 million for completion of the Pepper Park updates and expansion. The Port prioritized Rady Shell, Brigantine's Portside Pier, and other projects in the same timeframe, as revenue-producing ventures. This Board cannot adequately compensate National City residents for bearing the pollution burden of the Port's revenue-seeking ventures- immediate action and investment are required. We appreciate that several Commissioners expressed the desire to prioritize Pepper Park in the April 25<sup>th</sup> budget workshop

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and ask for appropriation from both the surplus and operating budget to fully fund the Pepper Park project, without further delay.

In the Maritime Clean Air Strategy, Community Goal 1 is to “enrich the Portside Community through Education, Engagement, and Urban Greening.” The Balanced Plan is currently the only opportunity the Port has to advance toward this goal in National City. Additionally, MCAS Health Goal 1 is to “Protect and improve community health by reducing emissions and lessening Portside Community residents’ exposure to poor air quality. Two projects in Logan could serve this goal by receiving match funding from the MIIF to help implement the Transformative Climate Communities grant proposal. This \$30 million grant is a historic level of state investment for environmental justice communities adjacent to the port. As requested, please direct Port staff to allocate funding to Boston Avenue Park and the Chicano Park Museum & Cultural Center’s proposed free electric shuttle micro-mobility program known as “Via Verde.”

The reality for the EJ communities EHC serves is that this is a case of past-due accounts. Logan and National City residents are routinely expected to wait longer, breathing more polluted air than most of the state, for investment from the Port that results in the quality of life benefits that residents of other Portside communities already enjoy. For every shareholder that receives a check from a company in a Port lease, many individuals bear the burden of hidden externalized costs that surface as health and economic disparities and environmental damage. Within this context, allocating a budget surplus elsewhere without first addressing the impact of industrial activity on exploited communities is a compounding of that harm.

The Port must work swiftly to meet the goals outlined in the Maritime Clean Air Strategy. For this effort to progress, we request that the Port convene an ad-hoc MCAS implementation work group and increase MIIF contributions to 5% of the Maritime budget. We also ask the Board to direct staff to prepare alternative funding pathways to realize the goals of the Balanced Plan, committing funding from both the FY2024 operating budget and the FY2023 budget surplus to Pepper Park improvements and expansion.

Thank you for your consideration of these requests,

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "JG Franco". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

José Franco García

Executive Director, Environmental Health Coalition