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With access threatened, Supervisor Mar calls for continuation of ferry service to Angel Island, former mass detention facility for immigrants

An estimated 1,000,000 immigrants were detained at the historic site of the Angel Island Immigration Center, including 250,000 Chinese immigrants detained under the Chinese Exclusion Act

San Francisco – On Tuesday, Supervisor Gordon Mar called for the protection and preservation of ferry service from San Francisco to Angel Island in a resolution introduced to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors.

“When my father and my grandmother came to this country, like thousands of other immigrants from China and elsewhere, they were detained at the Immigration Station on Angel Island. As we recognize Asian Pacific American Heritage Month, we have to recognize this history,” said Supervisor Mar. “Angel Island remains a vital part of our City, our State, and our nation’s history of immigration, and racist and exclusionary treatment of immigrants. To build a more just future, we have to contend with the injustices of our past. We have to preserve these places, their memories, and their lessons.”

Angel Island, the largest natural island in the San Francisco Bay, is a recreational destination, state park, and designated historic site. From 1910 to 1940, part of Angel Island was converted into a U.S. Immigration Station to detain, interrogate, and process an estimated 1,000,000 immigrants from 80 different countries, including 250,000 Chinese immigrants detained under the discriminatory Chinese Exclusion Act. The former Immigration Station is home to over 200 Chinese poems carved into the walls by detainees, and a solemn destination for visitors seeking to learn more about the history of immigration and the immigrant experience in San Francisco, California, and the United States.
Blue and Gold Fleet, the sole ferry service operator from San Francisco to Angel Island, has submitted an application to the California Public Utilities Commission to end its service, potentially cutting off access to the island and its historic sites for San Franciscans. Supervisor Mar's resolution calls on the California Public Utilities Commission, the California Department of Parks and Recreation, and the Golden Gate Bridge, Highway, and Transportation Board of Directors to identify solutions to maintain transportation service to Angel Island from San Francisco.

“Our access to a place where hundreds of thousands of immigrants were detained, our ability to walk the halls and rooms, to see the hundreds of Chinese poems carved into the walls by detainees, to see and hear and feel their stories — that access to our history is essential, and it is in jeopardy,” said Supervisor Mar.

In 1997, Angel Island Immigration Station was named a National Historic Landmark, and the San Francisco Board of Supervisors voted in 2010 to support the Angel Island Immigration Station Restoration and Preservation Act. The Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation, the primary nonprofit organization working to preserve the buildings at the former U.S. Immigration Station has raised over $40 million to preserve the Angel Island Immigration Station in partnership with other organizations, including $12 million to save and renovate the former hospital building and reimagine it as the Angel Island Immigration Museum, slated to open in 2021.

“The former Immigration Station at Angel Island reminds us of an important chapter in San Francisco, California, and US history. Especially during a time when we have witnessed increased anti-Asian attacks, it is even more important to connect with and learn from our nation’s history of racism and xenophobia towards Asians and Pacific Islanders,” said Edward Tepporn, the Executive Director of the Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation. “We thank Supervisor Mar, Supervisor Melgar, and the San Francisco Board of Supervisors for recognizing Angel Island’s important cultural and historical significance and for supporting efforts to maintain direct and affordable ferry service from San Francisco to this California and National Historic Landmark.”

Prior to the pandemic, half of Angel Island’s visitors took the Blue and Gold Fleet ferry from San Francisco to Angel Island. In addition to Supervisor Mar, the resolution is co-sponsored by Supervisor Myrna Melgar, and is expected to be before the San Francisco Board of Supervisors for a vote next Tuesday, May 11th.

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