

Andrew Morton

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To the members of the committee of inquiry, into the fire-fighter presumptive rights compensation and fire services (reform) bill 2017.

I am writing to support the proposed restructure of our fire services, and the creation of Fire Rescue Victoria.

I am currently a career fire-fighter, with the Metropolitan Fire Brigade, I am the Station Officer at Laverton North fire station, and have served with the MFB since 1999. I also have five years' experience with Airservices Australia as a fire-fighter. I volunteered with the CFA for in excess of twelve years and was Captain of the Caroline Springs Fire Brigade in the western growth corridor for more than four years.

I no longer volunteer with CFA, having resigned over ten years ago, this was a difficult decision to make as I had made a commitment to serve my local community. Some of the structural inadequacies left me with the sense that I was hindering, rather than supporting the creation of a safer community. My concerns centred around the issues of response failures, delayed responses, and the constant pressure to allow response by people who might not have an appropriate level of training.

During my tenure as a volunteer Captain the Caroline Springs Brigade had implemented a number of strategies in an attempt to improve their response capacity, however significant gaps remained. The concept of a failure to respond, or significant delays in response did not sit well with my desire to ensure that this community got the best service possible. The only way to properly guarantee a response capacity in line with community expectations was with career fire-fighters.

Life and death decisions are made by incident controllers at the incidents we attend. Being a member of the MFB I have the relative luxury of being able to commit fire-fighters into a structure in the knowledge that I have guaranteed and timely back up. The response time and qualifications of those who will be attending I have advance knowledge of. This allows me to make bold but considered decisions to maximise

the possibility of a positive outcome for any persons trapped, whilst ensuring the safety of our crews.

The current system does not offer these safe guards to those responding in heavily urbanised CFA areas. Having seen the system work from multiple angles, I believe that this reform is vital to ensure ongoing community safety and the best possible fire response model for all Victorians.

In highly populated urbanised areas, a guaranteed response with a guaranteed number of fire-fighters, with appropriate skills and qualification is a rightful community expectation. This is not guaranteed to many who reside and work in Melbourne's heavily urbanised growth corridors and regional centres.

The proposed reforms will alleviate the problems we currently face with a mismatch between capacity and community expectations. I also believe that the proposed structure will not diminish the role of volunteers. Outside the integrated stations there will be no change felt, within the integrated stations the need for volunteers will continue, as they will still be required to assist with large events and protracted incidents. The pressure to provide response in a timely manner will be every day of the year will be alleviated.

CFA are currently initiating an Emergency Medical Response (EMR) role utilising their career staff. MFB fire fighters have been performing this role for nearly twenty years. MFB career fire-fighters have saved countless lives through the EMR program, by providing early CPR and early de-fibrillation to people who are in cardiac arrest. The success of the program has hinged on the rapid response capacity of MFB. It is only with career fire-fighters that the EMR program will be effective, (due to their rapid response capacity). The reforms as proposed will ensure that the implementation of EMR is successfully expanded, furthering the safety of Victorians in outer Melbourne and our regional centres.

I thank you for considering my input to this committee, and look forward to a positive outcome to improve the safety of all Victorians.

Regards

Andrew Morton,