



[REDACTED]  
06/07/2017 04:07 PM

To Consultation/DTF@DTF  
cc  
bcc  
Subject Fire Services Reform Select  
Committee

1 attachment



Select Inquiry [REDACTED] submission.pdf

Hello,  
Please find attached my submission to the Fire Services Reform Select Committee.  
Please confirm receipt of my submission.  
Kind regards,

[REDACTED]

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Email sent using Optus Webmail

Assistant Clerk Committees  
Department of the Legislative Council  
Fire Services Bill Select Committee  
Parliament House, Spring Street  
EAST MELBOURNE  
VIC 3002

*Firefighters' Presumptive Rights and Fire Services Legislation Amendment  
(Reform) Bill 2017*

My name is [REDACTED], I am an Emergency Services Telecommunications Authority (ESTA) employee. I work as a call-taker and dispatcher for both fire services. I am a former volunteer firefighter of 10 years service and spouse of a serving CFA career firefighter. I wish to submit my support for the Bill.

When I was a CFA volunteer I responded when I could to serve my community, but I also worked full time, the time I could give to being a volunteer was limited as is the case with most volunteers. That expectation remains today for all CFA volunteers, but with huge population and urban growth this expectation places considerable pressure on volunteers to be able to respond in a timely manner.

When I was 9 years old in 1980 I moved to Carrum, the population was quite small. I remember it being mostly paddocks because my Nan took me to pat the horses down the road. The population of Patterson Lakes was tiny. Now populations of both of these suburbs has exploded. Where the horses were is now the Harbour Plaza Shopping Centre established in 1995 and comprising of over 25 stores. The Metropolitan Fire District boundary has barely changed to reflect urban growth, even though you can clearly see the population growth in this area is indicative of the growth trend all over Melbourne.

Not only is timeliness as factor in effective response but crew numbers with the necessary qualifications for the task. For example having appropriate number of qualified breathing apparatus (BA) search and rescue qualifications for responses to structure fires. I recall many times as a volunteer firefighter when we simply didn't have the crews with BA qualifications to efficiently suppress structure fires. That is the nature of volunteer based model, my fellow volunteers and I did what we could with whoever was available at the time, within our competencies.

I also have the experience of seeing this on a regular basis as I work in the communications center for both MFB and CFA. When there is a fire in the MFB area there is no doubt there are two professionally crewed trucks responding to all calls within 90 seconds and on scene within 7 minutes. In some CFA areas of metropolitan Melbourne there are always doubts, if, when, how many crew, what qualifications crews have.

When I dispatch some CFA brigades I sit there anxious for the community and the caller and hope that not only the brigade will respond, but also with a full crew of BA wearers. The community should not hope for a response, or hope there is a crew capable to conduct a BA rescue, it should be expected.

I have sat at my dispatch desk horrified when I hear a brigade finally respond to a house fire after failing their required turn out time, responding “one up” (only one volunteer crew member) or “responding Code 3 (no lights or sirens) due to no Code 1 driver” or “Re-page the brigade we don’t have a driver.”

An incident like this occurred just last night 5<sup>th</sup> July. There was a report of a house fire fully involved on the Bellarine Peninsula where the primary brigade failed their response time of 6 minutes, it took them 7 minutes to turn out and luckily only another one minute to arrive on scene. They then advised that they had only one BA accredited member on that truck. The communications center was advised that the house was abandoned but once on scene this crew was advised of the possibility of a squatter inside the premises. The crew then had to wait for the second appliance from that station to arrive on scene with another member with a BA accreditation to conduct a search for this person which was a further 6 minutes.

The local crews that were available did the best they could with the resources and personnel available at the time. I don’t think anyone can argue the commitment and effort of these crews, but circumstances where there are insufficient BA wearers for structure fires is not acceptable in 2017. In the Communications Centre I see these as regular occurrences across areas of outer Melbourne where fire service boundaries have barely changed for 60 years. This Bill will ensure an independent Fire District Review Panel will be established to make recommendations to boundary changes.

Others times I have dispatched volunteer brigades to emergencies staggered in disbelief that CFA CAD response tables has a professionally staffed station closer to the incident that can respond in 60-90 seconds with four highly trained firefighters not responding. I watch the time tick by concluding that the professional firefighters would have been on scene by the time some of the CFA brigades turnout. I can only assume territorial control is the motivator behind some of the senseless and dangerous response tables. With this Bill and the establishment of FRV, that will be legislated to support CFA, greater interoperability will be achieved and a more efficient response modelling will be adopted for the community.

I support this Bill as it will provide for my CFA career firefighter husband to be employed under FRV. With that comes increased safe working practices.

For many years I have asked my husband “How was your shift today?” I have heard so many stories where he was inside a burning house searching for trapped victims on his own, or with the pump operator that should be outside the structure fire securing a water supply for suppression. He would be inside this building with no other BA crews outside to rescue him if things went bad, or

indeed no guarantee the CFA volunteer brigade also paged to respond, will respond, with crew, and with crew that have BA competencies to rescue him.

Many times he has been at fires with volunteers that have responded to structure fires without BA qualifications. He would finish one stint in BA, replace his cylinder and do another stint, as the volunteers on scene didn't have the competencies. He maintains this isn't their fault, but a failing model of fire cover. We all understand that volunteers are just that and that they give as much time to complete their training to the best of their ability and to serve their communities as best they can. My husband's profession is already a dangerous one, so I need to know that when he enters a burning house or building he definitely has someone with him that is as equally qualified there with him, not only to perform a rescue if needed, but also to help him if the situation arises. These reforms will provide this. As I have previously mentioned the volunteer based model of service delivery does not provide certainty in response or qualified crew. This is no longer acceptable in 2017, nor should the community, or my husband accept it.

This Bill will see the standard of fire cover inner Melbourne receive expand to 35 current CFA areas, the workplace of my husband. This will see a second professional crew dispatched to incidents to ensure safe firefighter numbers and competencies for not only my husband, but for the victims of emergencies he attends.

On a more personal level I support this Bill as it will remove my husband's employer from the CFA to Fire Rescue Victoria. I want my husband out of CFA. Every time in the past 16 years when his EBA is due for renegotiation it drags the worst out of some CFA volunteers and the Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV). In the last decade, and more recently last two years, VFBV have considered it their role to interfere in the pursuit of safe workplace conditions of my husband's employment, on the premise it impacts on the role of volunteers. This is untrue.

It upsets me greatly that the Liberal and National Party (LNP) have attacked the integrity of my husband and his professional firefighter colleagues. The VFBV, LNP and some CFA volunteers have referred to him as greedy, a thug, a bully, power hungry, and many more slurs. This is because he chooses to seek safe working conditions and increased safety for the public in his EBA.

This has caused not only my husband great distress, but myself and our children as they are old enough to read newspaper articles and radio reports spreading untruths and misleading information. They are also old enough to join in on family conversations so they hear how upsetting the long drawn out process of EBA negotiations have been for their dad. Maybe because they are children or because it makes no sense, they cannot understand why the VFBV and some CFA Volunteers are fighting so hard against their fathers right for safe working conditions and equipment (which I might add are also passed on to the same volunteers who fight against it) when in actuality fact my husband's EBA will have little or no effect on volunteers at all.

I believe this Bill will remove my husband from this vitriolic CFA industrial environment to FRV. There should be no reason for VFBV to pursue further attacks on his profession when he is no longer employed by CFA. (Though I'm not confident of this). I would have thought this outcome would be desirable for CFA volunteers.

Under this reform CFA would revert back to volunteer only and the focus of CFA will be to strengthen and support their role. This is essential, as CFA need to focus on delivering training to volunteers. For example, providing training to all volunteers to have BA training as a minimum skill as professional firefighters do.

I fear what will happen if this Bill does not pass. I fear nothing will change. I fear sitting at my dispatch desk watching the failings of outdated fire service boundaries and response arrangements. I fear watching my husband suffer the harassment of VFBV and some CFA volunteers. This Bill is structured to deliver reform, and reform is desperately needed. Please support the passing of this Bill. Thank you for taking the time to read my submission.

Yours sincerely,

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature area.

I submit that my name and address remain confidential.