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07/07/2017 04:14 PM

To Consultation/DTF@DTF
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Subject Submission for Firefighters'
Presumptive Rights and Fire Services
Reform

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees,

RE: INQUIRY INTO THE FIREFIGHTERS' PRESUMPTIVE RIGHTS COMPENSATION AND
FIRE SERVICES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (REFORM) BILL 2017

Firstly I request that my name and contact details be kept confidential with this submission.

I write this submission in support of the proposed reform of fire services in Victoria and the introduction of presumptive rights compensation.

I have been employed as a firefighter with the Metropolitan Fire and Emergency Services Board (MFB) for a period of 3 years, and in that time I have been stationed at various locations within the metropolitan fire district, both in the CBD and outer fringe. I have also had the opportunity to work out of CFA stations during peak summer periods when crews are committed to protracted fire campaigns around the state, formally known as a 'step up'. Being stationed on the fringe and facilitating step ups has allowed me to work side by side with volunteers and gain an understanding in how they operate, as have many other MFB firefighters in the course of their duty. The fact that MFB firefighters work with volunteers is not something I have found the public are overly aware of.

Further to that, I was part of MFB Recruit Course 113 of 2014 which was the first ever combined MFB/CFA firefighter recruit course. In addition to the skills and qualifications I attained as part of the course I was given an in depth understanding of CFA procedures and some of the limitations their current response model has.

Safety is the number one concern. Safety of all firefighters and safety of the community that we serve. The main issues around safety and how this legislation can improve on it as I see are this:

All MFB and professional CFA firefighters possess, on successful completion of a recruit course, the same minimum skill sets, that being but not limited to, being qualified in the use of breathing apparatus, how to conduct search and rescues at a structure fire, and how to suppress a structure fire. On completion of a CFA volunteer course these same competencies are not taught. Some volunteer fire fighters have appropriate further training and can be utilised to the fullest but some do not. Regardless, this highlights that there is in fact a difference in the minimum standard and with this discrepancy no officer in charge of an incident can ever initially guarantee that all members being responded can be deployed appropriately to combat the situation at hand. This delay can be costly for both the crews and members of the public. With the knowledge that every professional firefighter at an incident has the relevant competencies this gives the OIC the latitude to quickly facilitate the mitigation of an emergency with no delay in what is an ever changing and dynamic scene. This is as equally important in the highly urbanised areas which still fall under the "country" banner as it is on Collins Street in the CBD.

Having appropriately trained crews on the fireground also allows for the "7 on the fireground" principle to be applied. This has time and time again been seen as Australian and World's best practice for firefighting operations. It has in fact been the method in which the MFB responds for many, many years now but the CFA have not been unable to fully adopt this model because as previously mentioned, a full contingent of structurally trained crews cannot be guaranteed. 7 on the fireground allows for the most efficient and safest way for firefighters to operate and effect rescues if required. The breakdown is as follows; two members in breathing apparatus are initially tasked with controlling the fire and searching a building for trapped persons. A further two members are there to assist the first two if they themselves were to become trapped or if they require further assistance or resources in effecting their duties. One firefighter is tasked with being the pump operator and ensuring a source of continuous water is attained and available to all internal and external crews at all times. One firefighter is delegated the safety officer of the scene and ensures all members are made aware of any risks or changes to the fireground, all utilities are isolated to the building and is ultimately responsible for all safety matters at the incident. Lastly the senior most officer at the scene is designated as the officer in charge of the incident and oversees all matters in relation to the firefighting operations and communications with the radio control centre. These practices ensure firefighters remain safe in what is a highly dangerous and unpredictable environment. Dangers to firefighters being minimised then allows them to better effect their job of protecting members of the community and their property.

Adding to the visible dangers on a fireground are also those dangers that aren't as easily seen. These dangers include smoke, chemicals and toxins, all of which are direct results of fire and are products of combustion. Study after study has proven that exposure to these unseen toxins has a direct relationship with the increased incidents of cancers with firefighters over the general public. We know more about how our bodies react and steps are in place to help give firefighters the best chance to avoid these situations where practical, but unfortunately that isn't always practical. Having more trained firefighters on the fireground allows for crews to be better rotated and lessens their exposure to these volatile environments. Questions have been asked why the fire services reform and presumptive legislation have been presented together and the reason is this; they go hand in hand. Having a better response to fires and emergencies lessens the chance of cancers being contracted by firefighters. Where those illnesses still arise the presumptive rights takes the burden off firefighters in what is a very troubling time in their lives. You cannot just support firefighters after they have gotten ill, support needs to start well before that and that is why both bills have been drafted together and need each other so as they both can be the most effective they can be in improving the current conditions.

All in all I believe these points highlight the need for change. My family ask that this long drawn out process comes to an end and they can be made to feel that the best work practices are employed and that all protective rights are available. I ask that all firefighters from all ranks of both the MFB and CFA are given the opportunity to move forward in a current, modern, further improved system and get on with the job of serving our communities.

Sincerely,

██████████
Fire Station 2
██████████

[REDACTED]

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