

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees,

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

I wish my submission to remain confidential, including my name and work location.

I would like to express my support for the long overdue reforms to Victoria's fire services.

My name is [REDACTED], I live in Rockbank and I've been employed as a firefighter with the Metropolitan Fire Brigade for 4 years. I hold the rank of Qualified Firefighter and I'm currently based at [REDACTED].

I find it unacceptable that in 2017 we base Victoria's level of emergency response on systems that were drawn up more than 60 years ago. I have seen first-hand just how essential it is to have an appropriately trained, ready-to-respond fire service in what is currently Melbourne's metropolitan fire district. I've also seen Melbourne's population grow significantly over recent decades while its fire services have remained noticeably stagnant.

In the four years I've worked as a firefighter, I've responded to numerous fire calls including cardiac arrests, drug overdoses, vehicle accidents, gas leaks, grass fires, house fires, high rise fires and variety of other time-critical emergencies. A delay of mere minutes can and does literally cost lives and destroy property. I find it extremely difficult to explain to my friends who live around the urban fringe that should any of these events occur where they live, fewer emergency responders would be sent and they'd potentially wait longer for them to arrive on scene when compared to other parts of Melbourne. It is imperative that this select committee consider what fire and emergency coverage they would like or would consider appropriate if they lived in these areas.

Responding to fires that occur in houses, apartments, workplaces, schools and hospitals is the core function of fire services. A well-established system of any modern fire service is to ensure the safety of both the occupants of these buildings, and the firefighters who attend by deploying a minimum of seven firefighters. Unlike inner Melbourne, this response is not guaranteed in areas like Geelong, Bendigo, Frankston, Shepparton, Dandenong, and Point Cook. These densely populated areas contain among other things high rise developments, major hospitals, universities, and large shopping centres. These regions and their residents are deserving of the exact same coverage that exists in inner Melbourne.

Last month a well-publicised fire took hold of the Grenfell residential tower in England. This fire took place in west London, crews were on scene within 6 minutes, more than 500 people live in the tower, 80 of which lost their lives. The fire accelerated rapidly due largely to the combustible cladding on the building's facade. This material has been found to be present on a number of buildings throughout Melbourne and Victoria.

I believe it is incumbent on this committee to consider the ramifications of a compromised emergency response to any incident that takes place in the densely populated regions of the state.

[REDACTED]

Finally, I want to convey to the Committee the emotional toll this ongoing dispute has had on both my colleagues and me. The tension and unease I have noticed within my workplace as well as in the community needs to end and a resolution which puts community safety at the forefront is essential. What began as an EBA negotiation has turned into a public, politically-driven agenda with little regard for the major issue at hand – public safety. When making your recommendations and vote, please make this your deciding factor.

Kind regards,

[REDACTED]