

## REQUEST FOR CONFIDENTIALITY OF NAME & CONTACT DETAILS

05/07/2017

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees,

### **Inquiry into the Firefighter's Presumptive Rights Compensation & Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017**

My name is [REDACTED].

I have been employed by the Metropolitan Fire & Emergency Services Board (MFESB) as a full time Professional Firefighter for over 10 years.

I hold a nationally accredited qualification in Fire Investigation (FI) and am undertaking the Advance Diploma in Public Safety (Fire Investigation). I currently work in the position of Fire Investigator in the Fire Investigation Unit (FIU) within the Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB).

Additionally, I hold other firefighting/emergency response related qualifications including EMR, Heavy Rescue, USAR and Trench Rescue.

I attained a number of external tertiary qualifications prior to joining the MFB including post graduate qualifications in occupational health and safety (OHS) and masters qualifications in risk management.

With my previous education and work experience in the health, OHS and risk management sectors, I am very aware of the health and safety risks posed by working full time as a professional/career firefighter and fire investigator. In addition to the immediate/acute risks to my health and safety (such as manual handling injuries, smoke inhalation, acute exposure to toxic substance, burns and impact injuries from collapsing structures) associated with responding to the range of incidents that firefighters respond to (such as structure fires, wildfires, collapsed buildings, hazardous materials (HAZMAT)/dangerous goods (DG) incidents), there is also the longer term risk of developing cancer as a result of repetitive exposure to carcinogenic/toxic substance/gases/vapours/fibres, both as a firefighter and fire investigator. Working full time as a firefighter increases my exposure to these risks.

I am willing to accept these risks to my health and safety so that I can pursue a career that I find rewarding, in a role where I can make a difference and assist the community in a meaningful way. However, as with all other employees in Victoria, I believe that should I be injured or contract an illness (such as cancer) in the course of, or as a result of my employment, that I should be covered by appropriate compensation. Research conducted by Monash University, with the findings reported in the *Final Report Australian Firefighters' Health Study* (refer to Note 1), has clearly established there is a greater risk of career firefighters developing certain types of cancer. As such I strongly support the introduction of presumptive legislation for Victorian firefighters.

The Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Legislation Committee Report (Senate Inquiry Report), dated September 2011, recommended that presumptive legislation for occupational cancers, in the form of the *Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Amendment (Fair Protection for Firefighters) Bill 2011 [Provisions]* (refer to Note 2) be passed with the types of cancer to be covered expanded. The Senate Inquiry Report findings are now internationally accepted as demonstrating the basis for the implementation of presumptive legislation to recognise occupational cancer for career firefighters. In the report, the Senate Committee expressed its recommendation that similar legislation be implemented in every Australian State and Territory. In the intervening years, the Tasmanian, Western Australian, South Australian, Northern Territory and Queensland Governments have all passed similar presumptive legislation for firefighters. The lack of such legislation for Victorian firefighters, almost 6 years after the Senate Inquiry, is incredibly disappointing. Victoria firefighters put their lives at risk every day, attending the same types of emergencies as firefighters in every other State and Territory in Australia, and yet we remain unprotected despite substantial evidence to support the increased risk of firefighters developing certain types of cancers.

In relation to the Victorian Fire Services Reform Inquiry, I strongly believe that creation a single career fire service and a separate volunteer fire service would be advantageous for volunteers, career firefighters and the Victoria community as a whole. Expansion of Melbourne in the years since the development of the Metropolitan Fire District (MFD) boundaries has created a situation where densely populated and heavily industrialised areas in Melbourne's outer suburbs are being covered by a volunteer service. I believe that volunteer firefighters have a vital role to play in provision of a comprehensive fire and emergency service across Victoria, however, with the growing population, greater level of risk and greater likelihood of volunteers working in areas distant from their home and the Brigade they volunteer at, there is a need to provide a greater response than volunteers can be expected to provide.

As a volunteer life saver, I understand the importance of volunteering to both individuals and our communities in Victoria. I have volunteered for over 17 years and have found that volunteer life savers and paid lifeguards both have a vital role to play in keeping the community safe. In my experience volunteer life savers and paid life guards have always worked together to provide the community with a greater service than either could individually provide. I believe that this should and could be the case with volunteer and career firefighters. Due to the recent history, I don't believe this can be achieved with the current model, that is the MFB and CFA as they currently are. Implementation of the Fire Service Reform would enable career firefighters to focus on providing a high quality fire and emergency response service to the communities they cover. A CFA for volunteers would return this service to its original intention and allow the organisation to focus on the needs of its volunteers.

As such I strongly support the implementation of both the presumptive legislation and Fire Service Reform being considered by the Committee.

Thank you for your consideration of my submission.

Notes:

1. <http://www.coeh.monash.org/downloads/finalreport2014.pdf>)
2. [http://ufuav.asn.au/wp/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/11\\_09\\_15\\_senate\\_inquiry\\_report.pdf](http://ufuav.asn.au/wp/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/11_09_15_senate_inquiry_report.pdf)