

4<sup>th</sup> July 2017

Fire Services Bill  
Select Committee 2017

Dear Committee Members,

My name is Zac Ablett and I'm writing to express my support for the proposed Fire Services Reform Bill. I am a Leading Firefighter in the MFB, and have served for more than five and a half years. I am currently stationed at Hawthorn Fire Station and hold qualifications as a Hazmat Technician and in Breathing Apparatus Service.

I grew up in regional Victoria where I also volunteered with the local Cowes CFA Volunteer Fire Brigade through a high school program. I understand the importance and absolute necessity of effective volunteer brigades and their important role in local communities.

From my experience in the fire service I have seen the difference between a fully urbanised area and a regional town. Coming to the Metropolitan Fire Brigade with a country perspective, it was quite a shock to see how dated the distinctions between country and metropolitan areas are. It was also a shock to see that there were two different full time services that operate under different procedures and use different equipment – even though they both respond to calls together and cover the same city.

I've seen from personal experience the devastation of family homes from fires in areas that don't have the luxury of full time fire service coverage, and I have seen contrasting results where houses and lives have been saved from fire due to the swift response of a full time fire service. Understandably, not every area in Victoria can be covered by a full time service – which is why the volunteer service is vital. Of course I have also seen positive results in volunteer covered areas where brigades have had fantastic saves. However, timely volunteer response (with fully qualified firefighters) is not always guaranteed. There are some areas covered by volunteer brigades that are still classified as "country", yet have the same population density as other areas covered by full time fire services. In these suburbs in particular, volunteer firefighters can't respond in the same amount of time as a full time station. Volunteers, like everyone else in the community, have busy lives and work commitments, and with a growing population in Melbourne they also have heavier road traffic to drive through to get to their station to turn out. They may be excellent firefighters, but they simply can't respond to time critical incidents as swiftly and effectively as a full time fire station. Particularly for the built-up urban areas that are still classified as "country", this system is in desperate need of reform.

I have also come to learn how important it is for the system to be revitalised through speaking to a number of CFA full-time counterparts who work in urbanised areas still classified as "country". Some of my CFA colleagues have spoken of turning out to fires where they don't get another truck as back-up on scene for almost an hour – or more – as a volunteer brigade hasn't been able to turn out to that call. I know from

experience at fires in the metropolitan area that even minutes can seem like hours before the next appliance arrives. Having a system that better guarantees backup crews is extremely important for both the safety of firefighters and the safety of the community, and having a system where all career firefighters follow the same procedures and use the same equipment will create a far more effective, safe, and interoperable fire service.

Furthermore, I believe this reform will be symbolic and help to improve attitudes in the community and the fire services. While there have been misunderstandings from both sides in the fire service and misrepresentations from political groups and the media, most members of the three different streams (CFA volunteers, CFA full time firefighters and MFB full time firefighters) want to see an improvement in relations between the three. In my opinion, rather than two full-time services working separately with each other and the volunteer brigades, the creation of one full-time body would result in a more cohesive entity for the interaction between full-time staff and volunteers and subsequently create a more cohesive fire service for the Victorian community.

For the fire services in Victoria to develop and move forward, I believe this change is extremely important and fundamentally necessary for the future of Victoria's fire services. It is also important for the safety of Victoria's community and the safety of the firefighters who protect it. For these reasons I fully support the proposed Bill for the Fire Services Reform.

Yours sincerely,

Zachary Ablett

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