

**Kirra Vanzetti**

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**From:** Ben Townsend [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, 5 July 2017 10:00 AM  
**To:** LCSC  
**Cc:** io3@ufuvic.asn.au  
**Subject:** INQUIRY INTO THE FIREFIGHTERS' PRESUMPTIVE RIGHTS COMPENSATION AND FIRE SERVICES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (REFORM) BILL 2017

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees

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

My name is Benjamin Townsend. I am a Senior Station Officer located at Ballarat City CFA brigade. I have been a professional firefighter for approximately ten years with a number of years' service as a volunteer fire fighter previous to this. I have also worked as an emergency dispatcher (fire) at the Emergency Services Telecommunications Authority prior to my employment with CFA. I have been a proud and passionate member of the CFA and want to see the fire services of Victoria remain strong. I believe that fire service reform is necessary in order to ensure that our fire services are world renowned well into the future.

I live in Buninyong Victoria and work at Ballarat City, a short drive from my local community. My loved ones have grown up in the greater Ballarat are and have raised families of their own. The area that my brigade is charged with the responsibility to protect encompasses my family, my relatives and close friends. I want to see fire service reform in order to ensure the maximum protection for the community I live in and those I love.

I am writing this submission in support of the proposed reform of the fire services for a number of reasons. However as I am sure you are receiving numerous submissions I will aim to keep mine brief and focus mainly on the issue of safety on the fire ground and maximum protection for the community.

As a Firefighter, a manager in charge of other firefighters and an Incident Controller in charge of various fires and incidents, safety is my number one concern. Through studies conducted around the world and in depth analysis of "world's best practice" we can see that it is important to have guaranteed backup in this industry. Safety guidelines around the world suggest that two trucks with at least 7 firefighters need to be dispatched within 8 minutes to ensure safe firefighting operations can occur and ensure the best chance of a successful outcome for affected parties. Whilst I am no analyst, I can speak first hand on the impact of unreliable backup on the fire ground.

Victoria has changed yet we as a fire service have failed to change with her. The days of relying on a volunteer response in highly urbanised, high risk areas is past. The level of risk purely from the growth of the communities alone is enough to warrant increased professional fire coverage. Through the fire services levy these communities are paying for a service they are not receiving! Fire service reform will take a much more in depth look in to Victorian communities and ensure the service coverage matches the risk of the area.

Having spent the majority of my career working at a station with only three career firefighters on shift, surrounded by volunteer support brigades, I have been placed in an unsafe situation at numerous incidents. Arriving at a going house fire with only three members, one of those myself, is daunting to say the least. Our own Chief Officers standard operating procedures state that "four

members must be present on the fire ground before safe firefighting operations can occur". On numerous occasions I found myself in a situation where we had a going house fire, unsure if any persons are still inside the building and only three members on scene. Often in these cases we were also trying to deal with distraught owners or residents of the house as well as onlookers, all of which exacerbated the situation further. These situations have been a cause for much personal distress throughout my own career as I was faced with a monumental task, attempting to achieve a successful firefight with a skeleton crew and unconfirmed backup. This situation is not acceptable for me, my crew, Victoria's Fire Services nor the Victorian community as a whole. Whilst the volunteers surrounding the station I worked at were skilled and competent operators who worked tirelessly for their communities, a fact that I admire and commend, due to current trends and the need to work harder and longer to meet the ever increasing demands of cost of living, response was far from guaranteed. And how could it be? The ever increasing demands being placed on volunteers in these highly urbanised, expanding and high risk areas is ludicrous to say the least.

Having said all of this I believe Fire service reform is absolutely needed for the following reasons:

1. Ensure the safety of all firefighters by ensuring safe firefighting operations can be undertaken with correct crew numbers
2. Increasing response to highly urbanised high risk areas of Victoria to ensure better protection and safety for the community
3. End the dispute and atrocious public bastardising of Professional firefighters. A situation that has caused major strain on myself, my work colleagues and my family
4. Ensure a more fluent and standardised response in all highly urbanised areas of Victoria through standardisation of career training, specialist response and standards
5. Creating a Fire Service in Victoria that will remain world renowned, be future proofed and ensure a cohesive and complete coverage of all of Victoria and her varying levels of risk
6. Return CFA to its roots as a Volunteer organisation along with the support it requires to be a more modern version of itself. Support for volunteers and "surge capacity" will be on hand at all times from the CFA and the newly formed professional fire service to ensure volunteers can and will be protecting Victorians from bushfire and other incidents well into the future.

I would like to finish by thanking you for taking the time to consider my submission. As I see it and I hope you do also, I believe this is the best and only option for Victoria's Fire Service going forward. This restructure ensures that professional firefighters are on call and available for the protection of Victorians at all times and that we as workers can do our highly dangerous job in a safer manner. It ensures that CFAs proud and strong history of a volunteer organisation remains intact and strengthens the emphasis on this being a primarily volunteer organisation. Finally the reform ensures that this bitter dispute can be laid to rest once and for all so we can all get back to doing what we do best. Protecting the people of Victoria.

Thank you again.

Yours sincerely,  
Ben



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