

Dear Committee,

My name is Peter Halasz and I am a Leading Fire Fighter with the MFB where I have been employed as a career fire fighter for the past 8 years. I write to you to express my support for the proposed fire services reform.

My family and I have lived in Taylors Hill for the past 11 years and have first-hand experienced the sharp increase in population in these areas. Upon undertaking my research I have found that the population of Caroline Springs, Sydenham, Taylors Hill and Plumpton have all doubled since 2006, with Caroline Springs alone recording an increase of 12,000 occupants. Of note, Victoria's fire services boundaries have not changed significantly in 60 years. 60 years ago the suburbs of Caroline Springs, Sydenham, Taylors Hill and Plumpton were nothing but farming land with a handful of houses. We see the same population growth and urban expanse in areas such as Frankston, Cranbourne, Dandenong, Craigieburn, Melton, Springvale, Boronia and Geelong. However, according to long out-dated fire service boundaries these are all considered country areas that do not currently have an adequate fire response. We see logical progress in almost every aspect of suburban and population growth planning by the government. We see new roads, extra schools, new hospitals to address population growth.....why not with our Fire Service?

Throughout my time with the MFB, I have spent the large majority of my career at St. Albans fire station, where we protect a densely built up and populated area. We attend a large variety of calls most common of which are house fires, car fires and emergency medical responses.

St. Albans fire station is currently on the CFA/MFB boundary and as such we also turn out to calls to CFA volunteer areas such as Caroline Springs, Taylors Hill and Plumpton. We attend calls with volunteer fire-fighters on a regular basis and from personal experience I found volunteers and career staff have worked well together at all times. At large grass fires that I have attended, the volunteers' skillset allowed them to contribute to bringing the incident under control in an incredibly timely manner. Unfortunately, while attending house fires in CFA areas, I have found from experience that the volunteers become significantly limited in their ability to assist due to the low number that are trained in wearing a breathing apparatus which is required for entry into a burning structure. Entering a burning structure allows quicker extinguishment of the fire, but most significantly allows the rescue of occupants potentially trapped in the house. The high level of combustibility of components used to build modern furniture and houses has exponentially increased how quickly fire spreads, resulting in a significant shortening of the necessary time-frame required for fire-fighters to arrive on scene. We routinely drive up to 13km into Plumpton and the furthest turnout I had was 20km to Sunbury to assist with a medical clinic fire. These lengthy turnouts into CFA areas from career fire-fighters, paired with the unpredictability of the availability of volunteers, their delayed response times and

absence of sufficient training means that houses are often lost to fire and rescue of trapped occupants becomes unfeasible. The fire services reform would allow a rapid 8 minute response, with 7 professional career fire-fighters on two fire trucks as the minimum standard needed in highly urbanised areas.

The MFB have been involved with the Emergency Medical Response (EMR) program since 2004. Through this program, all MFB fire-fighters are fully trained to perform CPR, administer oxygen and defibrillate patients. This enables us to work alongside paramedics to revive patients that are in cardiac arrest due to heart attack, trauma or drug overdose. Our rapid response means we often arrive on scene prior to paramedics and our early involvement helps save lives. In the last three months I have personally attended three EMR calls to patients in full cardiac arrest, that through our training and early intervention, were given a second chance at life. This does not happen in volunteer areas. Why should densely populated areas such as where my family and I live not have access to this?

Volunteer fire-fighters have always played a crucial role in Victoria's rural communities and will continue to do so. The employing of all career fire-fighters in the one fire service will have no impact on volunteer turnout or surge capacity. Career staff will continue to work together with volunteers to make Victoria safer. The reforms to the fire service will allow career staff from CFA and MFB to standardise our equipment, trucks and training which will result in us working even more efficiently than what we currently are. The reforms will also allow volunteer brigades to greatly benefit from increased funding to allow greater recruitment, training, equipment and more stations across the CFA. Most importantly, it will bring up to date a frighteningly out of date Victorian fire services boundary and provide the necessary fire response to the many people living in the now highly urbanised suburbs that were predominantly farming lands when the fire boundary were drawn up.

Lastly, I would like to express my gratitude to you for allowing me to express my personal experiences and opinions regarding the fire services bill and the reform. The fire services reform will without a question save lives.

Kind regards

Peter Halasz

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