

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees,

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

I am a Professional fire fighter at Springvale fire station, and have been employed by the CFA for 3 years. Over my 3 years with the CFA I have also been stationed at Sunbury fire station (8 months) and Eltham (2 years). I am writing this submission in support of the proposed reform of the fire services for the following reasons:

Throughout my time with CFA I have had the opportunity to be able to work at many different integrated stations across the state. One key problem I have noticed with the current model of Victorian fire services is that depending on what station you are working at will determine the level of back up and support that firefighters are provided with when attending incidents, and the level of service that the community is provided.

Whilst working at Eltham fire station it would depend which part of our area we were responding to as to what back up was provided. For example, if we were to head south out of the fire station to a house fire, I knew that we would have a second truck with suitably qualified professional MFB firefighters responding within 90 seconds of receiving the call. The benefits of having 7 firefighters responded to a house fire who are suitably qualified to use Breathing Apparatus and trained in structural firefighting are immense. This allows firefighters to enter a building with the knowledge that if something was to go wrong whilst you are inside and your safety was compromised that there is a second crew ready and appropriately qualified to assist you.

However if we headed north out of the station, we were then relying on the back up from Research fire brigade, a CFA volunteer Brigade. Whilst volunteers do their best to respond in a timely manner with an appropriate level of crewing, this is not always possible. Under current arrangements, Eltham are responded to a call at the same time as Research, you then have to wait and see if the Research volunteers respond to the station within the 4 minute allocated response time, if they meet this time they then respond to the call with the crew available, if they don't meet this time the process begins again and a the next brigade is called and given a further 4 minutes to respond. If they do meet the required response time then there is no way of knowing the skills mix that the crew have responding until they arrive on scene. This could mean that the appliance is responded with a full crew of 5 firefighters or a single firefighter, however even with a full truck there may be no firefighters on that truck that are qualified to enter a structure and assist where required.

When seconds can determine whether or not a person survives in an emergency situation, I don't believe it is unreasonable to expect suitably qualified back up to be responded to any incident I am attending. Firefighting is an inherently dangerous career, we can limit the danger to firefighting crews and the general public, who we are here to protect, by reforming the fire services and providing a modern firefighting force that reflect the needs of Victorian communities.

IMPACT ON VOLUNTEERS:

This is one question that keeps coming up, this question has been asked more than what is the impact on communities. Volunteers do a fantastic job for the community, and will continue to do so if FRV legislation is passed. CFA volunteers will then have the autonomy to work in the best ways that suite their brigades. In the current form CFA career firefighters and volunteer firefighters are managed in a 'one size fits all' model, as I am sure you can understand this doesn't always work when bundled in with career staff.

Surge capacity will not be effected by returning the CFA to a volunteer only organisation. Whilst there will be 35 CFA stations that come under the FRV banner, the volunteers from these stations will still operate and provide a valuable service to the community. These volunteers will have the opportunity to either stay in the current integrated stations or move to a new stand alone CFA station. As a former volunteer firefighter with Rural Fire Service Queensland (RFSQ), it is offensive to suggest that volunteers will just pack up and leave their communities due to these changes. Volunteers work within their communities to provide the best service they can, however due to the growth of Melbourne's outer metro areas, this service needs to be adjusted to best suite the community. If anyone can't see the benefit of providing more career firefighters with a guaranteed 90 second response time, then I don't believe they are in it for the right reasons. If it was your family that is in a house fire, trapped in a car or in cardiac arrest then I'm sure you would appreciate a 90 second response time with suitably qualified people.

Fire Service Reform is overdue in Victoria and I hope the committee can remove the politics from their decision and do what is best for all firefighters and the communities that we serve. I look forward to a positive future with Fire Rescue Victoria.

Yours Sincerely

Ricky Alderdice

