

Kirra Vanzetti

From: Sam Kayler-Thomson [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, 6 July 2017 8:25 PM
To: [REDACTED]; LCSC
Subject: Fire Services Reform

By email: LCSC@parliament.vic.gov.au

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees

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

1.

My name is Sam Kayler-Thomson

- Leading Firefighter at Corio Fire Station
- I work for the CFA
- I have been a professional Firefighter for 6 years
- I have completed a 16 week recruit course at Fiskville in 2011, along with modules relevant to career progression, I became a qualified firefighter in August 2014, I then completed a 3 week Leading Firefighter development course in August 2016 and successfully obtained the rank of Leading Firefighter in November of 2016 following completion of theoretical and practical assessments.

- I have completed the following specialist roles

- Teleboom Aerial appliance,
- Hazmat Technician
- CBR Operator (chemical, biological and radiological)
- Ground Observer
- Protective Equipment Van
- Thermal Imaging Camera operator

Along with these specialist roles I have worked across numerous functional roles of the Corio fire station including Finance and Admin, which involved balancing accounts and ensuring suppliers were paid, and currently Operations which involves the maintenance, and upkeep of operational equipment, updating our alarmed premises, updating equipment.

2. I live in Armstrong Creek which is a growing new estate, and work in Corio.

3. I am writing this submission in support of the proposed reform of the fire services for the following reasons:

- Reasons why as a firefighter that it is important to have guaranteed backup - guaranteed that two trucks with at least 7 firefighters will be dispatched within 8 minutes. I have worked in an area which supports regularly into volunteer areas for my whole career, during this time I have been put into dangerous situations due to the massive differences in our training; one example was when I was conducting an internal fire attack operating off a local volunteer brigade's truck. While inside I lost water and had to retreat, another was supporting a volunteer brigade to a car fire, it was the result of an accident and it was thought that there was still someone trapped. On arrival it was just myself and an officer, as we were supporting we only take one truck to maintain area coverage. I had to engage and set the pressures on the pump, then don a breathing apparatus, and conduct an aggressive fire attack whilst searching the vehicle for a possible casualty. The job was also on a main highway and we had traffic passing us at 100kmh. In this instance there was no casualty and I walked away from the job with nil injury. However the risks of working at a going job like this with only 2 people is huge, with potential for catastrophic consequences.

I am in no way blaming the volunteers for this, but the time commitment for volunteers in this day and age is huge I blame an outdated system that puts huge demands on volunteers. The time commitment is massive,

along with work commitments, family commitments the dedication that volunteers have to firefighting is commendable. Unfortunately this also means that they cannot always be out the door in time, and quick response is critical to the preservation of life and property.

This is my career, I do this to put food on my table and provide for my family, I want to be able to go to work and do what I do without having to worry about outside party's interfering with my pay and conditions. The last 4 years of negotiations has resulted in massive amounts of extra stress, I have seen morale drop. I have seen colleagues who I thought had been through horrible things reach tipping point and beyond, because of the extra stress and the unknown for the future of our careers. We deserve certainty at the very least. The fire service reform will deliver that.

The community will benefit by having a guaranteed response whenever they dial 000.

- Having all professional firefighters working for the one organization makes sense. It will give volunteers ownership of the CFA; they will still turn out and have the surge capacity they always have
- Volunteer support will be maintained with operational firefighters (Operations officers, Operations Managers etc. being employed by FRV but continuing their roles through an arrangement with CFA)
- The reform areas are around the 35 integrated stations primary response areas. These boundaries have been in effect since the 1950s when these areas were small country towns. The demand on volunteers to the number of calls these areas are now getting is huge, not to mention the growth of risk in these areas. The good work that these volunteers do will continue to be done and there will be no effect on other volunteer brigades or bushfire response and surge capacity.
- These 35 areas are now highly urbanised – high residential and other risks such as prisons, industrial areas, manufacturing, major road and rail.
- The reform will assist with standardisation of career training/specialist response/response standards and equipment,
- The reform will benefit volunteers as it has included a package to assist with volunteer recruitment and retention across the CFA; and includes funding for volunteer station upgrades, any rumours that volunteers will be disadvantaged is simply untrue.
- The introduction of presumptive legislation, gives **all** firefighters the reassurance that in the likely event we contract a cancer due to the work we do. We will be looked after.

4. Below are examples from my experiences which demonstrate the failures of the current structure:

I have had many occasions where our Pumper (the main truck we use for urban firefighting) has needed repairs or maintenance, it is often replaced by a spare Pumper which is great in theory, however, even in the one organisation the differences between pumpers is borderline dangerous. We often have to pick gear that we hope we won't need to use to leave off the spare as the stowage areas are different and we simply cannot fit all of our gear onto the spare. My station has numerous specialist appliances which I outlined in my qualifications at the beginning, one of which is a Heavy Hazmat, this can be responded to anything with hazardous materials, chemical spills, gas leaks, chemical warfare events, bomb incidents, and it can perform mass casualty decontamination, and will even attend house fires to monitor air quality. The point I am getting to is that at the moment in the CFA there are 3 of these strategically located around the state. They were all commissioned around the same time. They are all slightly different in the way they are built. Uniformity can only be a positive step.

The differences in training has been one of the biggest areas of concern to me, an example of this is our breathing apparatus training. As a recruit firefighter, I completed 5 full days of BA training. This was then honed by weeks of training in drills. As a volunteer, the systems seem to vary, but there is approximately 4 training nights which are on average 1 and a half hours, followed by an assessment. Again this is not criticizing the volunteers for the great work they do, but there has to be a better way.

The fact that we still operate in a system which lets most senior person in the first arriving truck be in charge of that job as opposed to the most competent person at the incident is dangerous, any talk that a lieutenant and leading firefighter, or a captain and a station officer are trained the same

Thankyou for taking the time to read my submission.

Regards,

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