

I, Joseph Suarez, Station Officer with the Metropolitan Fire and Emergency Services Board, submit a submission in support of the Fire Services Reform.

This reform will ensure all Victorians have an improved and prompt service across the entire state. In an emergency situation, every second is important and any delay in getting to an incident or developing a mitigation strategy has a cost. Unfortunately, in our working environment, that cost could be lives and/or property.

As a Station Officer, I have turned out with the CFA volunteers on many occasions outside of the metropolitan district. In each case the MFB has demonstrated its capacity to support the CFA with additional breathing apparatus operators. Increased search capabilities, particularly in structural fires, has concluded with many positive outcomes for affected community members. MFB response times have also allowed us to get to work prior to the CFA volunteers' arrival and assisted in containing the fire to the room of origin.

As a manager on the fire ground, it is essential to know what skill sets and resources are available. This enables effective planning and the implementation of optimal strategies to safely mitigate the incident/fire/hazard. At the moment, if I am turned out with CFA volunteers, I am not quite sure what resources and skill sets I am going to be able to utilise. This can compromise fire ground safety and lead to less than optimal outcomes if the expected resources are not there.

Currently, I am the Station Officer in the Urban Search and Rescue department within the MFB. This is a state-based capacity department. We run combined emergency services skills acquisition and maintenance programmes, including CFA and Ambulance Victoria as well as the MFB. This model and the effective relationships developed across services has been highly successful. It demonstrates the effectiveness of working in unison to develop consistent, best-practice training outcomes.

All Victorians deserve policies that enable the fire service to meet the challenges of a growing state. Given the appropriate resources to develop this reform, it will start to address the gap in service delivery to some Victorian communities. As a single, combined service, all firefighters - be they full-time or volunteer - will have a greater understanding of each other's capacities and will be better able to work together. This will lead to a safer working environment and ultimately assist us in protecting the community as effectively as possible.

As a firefighter of 18 years the most important outcome for me, whether it is training or responding, is to provide the best service delivery to the community I possibly can.