

Kirra Vanzetti

From: Brenton Webb [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, 4 July 2017 4:17 PM
To: LCSC
Subject: Fire Services Reform

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees

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

My name is Brenton Webb and I am a 2nd generation professional MFB firefighter and have been for 2 years. I currently hold the rank of Fire Fighter. I currently reside in Torquay and currently work at Sunshine Fire Station (MFB, FS44)

My qualifications including specialist qualifications are; EMR/First Responder, and I have completed a Certificate 2 & 3 in Public Safety (Firefighting and Emergency Operations).

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

During my time at Sunshine and St Albans Fire Stations, I have responded to numerous fire calls where the CFA career staff were tied up at another call. In those instances, we have arrived on scene unknowing when or if a volunteer brigade were going to arrive and if they would have the suitable qualifications for the type of call ie. BA and structural fire fighting. Additionally, to say that volunteer and career firefighters are trained the same, is simply not true and to argue otherwise is mendacious. This is by no means a poor reflection on volunteers but rather a reality in that, sometimes, for numerous reasons they are unable to attend both emergency calls and training. Firefighters have many skills and qualities that make them very employable meaning that their full time work commitments can impact on the time they need to devote to their volunteer firefighting. When call volumes are low as in rural Victoria, this is not so much of an issue and can be managed by the employer however, in urban areas where there are a large volume of calls an appropriate and timely response cannot be guaranteed, this fact is evident in call history data where 'failed to respond' and 'delayed' responses are common.

A rapid 8 minute response, with 7 professional career firefighters on two fire trucks is the minimum standard needed in highly urbanised areas. This reform will enable this to occur and thus ensuring firefighter safety and increasing the safety to our Community. This response will just to name a few, will assist in maximising the ability to contain fires to the room of origin, give an EMR patient the best chance at survival by having rapid medical intervention and will give firefighters numbers on the fireground to be able to conduct search and rescue safely. Further benefits to those directly involved and the greater community are; saving a dwelling whether it be a home, business or school, not needing to displace families, less smoke impacting the community and environment. The list goes on. Furthermore, there is nothing in these reforms that will stop volunteers responding to emergencies as they do now whether it be rural or urban. What the reform does, is provide the community with a streamlined and highly structured initial response under the one response system which is what they deserve.

I believe the biggest benefit of the fire services reform is the introduction of an independent Fire District review panel. The panel will use Triple 000 data, projected populations figures and urban development when determining the necessity for a professional response. This is something that is currently missing and unfortunately has resulted in many highly urbanised areas heavily relying on volunteer responses, the enormous growth has resulted in increased emergency calls and places an ever increasing and unrealistic demand on volunteer firefighters and also leaves such large communities somewhat exposed.

Projected growth forecasts in the Western corridor which is where I currently work;

Tarneit in 2011 had approx 21,000 residents. In 2021, they are forecasting 44,500 and in 2031 there will be 75,000 (an increase of 54,000)

Rockbank in 2011 had approx 1,400 residents. 2021 will see 7,300 residents followed by a whopping 47,000 by 2031 (a huge increase of 45,600)

Melton South in 2011 had 9,000. In 2021 they are forecasting 26,700 and then 47,000 to be there in 2031 (an increase of 38,000 residents).

Similarly where I reside;

Geelong in 1956 had approx 88,000 residents, it currently has approx 240,000 and is predicted to rise to 320,000 by 2036.

Geelong is also the second largest city in Victoria, and for the four integrated stations that service it and the Bellarine call rates have almost doubled from 2796 responses in 2006 to 4971 responses in 2016.

It goes without saying that such a huge increase in population in these currently labelled 'rural' areas, will without a doubt see an increase in emergency calls. Leaving the fire services as they are will put an even greater unrealistic demand on our volunteer firefighters to cover these areas. The fire services reform especially with the introduction of the Fire District Review panel will ensure these areas receive the service that it statistically requires.

The constant vilification and attack on professional firefighters has been abhorrent. 20 plus front pages on the Herald Sun and constant social media barraging mistruths has taken a toll on myself and my family. The undue stress of having to face emergencies with this added pressure is accumulative and affecting the health and wellbeing of professional firefighters. These mistruths and attacks are coming from all directions; politicians with political agendas, VFBV and ill-informed members of the public. This behaviour must end, firefighters have had enough, the Community have had enough, it is time to repair the damage done and focus on the future.

As the committee for the fire services reform will be evidence based, I believe the data and the facts will speak for themselves and the emotion must be put aside.

All Victorian, professional and volunteer firefighters, deserve modern fire services that meet the needs of our growing communities.

To ensure the safety of all Victorians - including me as a firefighter, I ask you to please seriously consider your support for the proposed fire services reform.

Reform of our fire services will ensure the safety of your constituents, and all communities in our growing state.

I also respectfully submit that you give consideration to my request to modernise the fire service along with the introduction of presumptive legislation laws to protect fire service employees. Both are needed to be endorsed and implemented by Parliament before the commencement of the fire season. This is important to me and my colleagues.

Kind regards

Brenton Webb

Fire Fighter, MFB

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