

Prue Purdey

From: Paul [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, 27 June 2017 12:29 PM
To: LCSC
Subject: FIRE SERVICES BILL SELECT COMMITTEE

To Fire Services Select Committee,

My name is Paul Murphy; my family and I have been involved in Victoria's fire services for 45 years, volunteering with Kalorama since 1972 and I have been a professional firefighter for the MFB for 30 years. I am currently based at Croydon fire station and before that at Wheelers Hill and central Melbourne. I have seen both sides - as a volunteer and a professional.

I write to express my support for the proposed fire services reform. This email is not about denigrating volunteers. They do an amazing job under very difficult circumstances. First hand I know however that they are not always available to turn out to alarms of fire. Over the years it has become more and more difficult as volunteers work away from their stations and employers are not as willing to release staff. They also have family and other commitments.

Working at Croydon fire station our members often turn out with volunteer brigades including Bayswater, Mooroolbark, Montrose, Chirnside Park, Wonga Park, Lilydale and The Basin. First hand I can tell you that these brigades do not always turn out in their required six minutes and on scene 8 minutes, there are times when they do not turn out at all (call histories and statistics would be available). If a volunteer does not respond another volunteer brigade is despatched, therefore increasing the response time of volunteers to the call leaving career crews without back up for a considerable time. Twice last month alone Mooroolbark did not respond to (1) a call in their area for an alarm of fire (MFB crew drove past their station to get to call) and (2) a gas leak/house fire to support Croydon. Career firefighters pride themselves on responding to calls within 7.4 minutes 90% of the time, this is the benchmark, unfortunately, volunteer brigades in our area fail up to 50% of the time to respond within 8 minutes. This leaves our professional crews without the backup required to successfully attack house fires and other emergencies. Some brigades attend, however they will not be BA qualified (breathing apparatus), they will have insufficient members on appliance (two only) or they will respond code 3 (normal road traffic conditions). There are many times they arrive on scene but have no structurally qualified firefighters present. This means they are unable to enter a building to perform rescues, internal firefighting attacks and provide back up to other firefighters.

The Victorian fire services boundaries have not changed significantly in 60 years. This is in desperate need of amendment. Croydon and surrounds in particular have seen huge growth in population and industry. It is no longer the "country town" it was back 60 years. Victorian public deserve better than this. All people should be entitled to a service guaranteed of a quick response with qualified firefighters. A rapid 8 minute response, with 7 professional career firefighters on two fire trucks is the minimum standard needed in highly urbanised areas.

EMR (emergency medical response) is another very important factor to consider. People who live in areas covered by professional firefighters are fortunate enough to have this vital lifesaving initiative available to them. Unfortunately due to the out dated fire district boundaries, EMR stops at the end of the Metropolitan fire district. Crews from Croydon are not responded into heavily populated and industrial areas of Montrose, Mooroolbark, Kilsyth Sth, Bayswater due to this invisible line drawn up over 60 years ago. A strategic analysis report done by MFB shows that crews from Croydon MFB can reach far into these suburbs well within 8 minutes to perform life saving EMR. And as our population ages this is an important role to ensure our loved ones have the best outcome.

The average suburb (eg: Montrose, Mooroolbark, Lilydale and Bayswater) population around the Metropolitan Fire District is around 15000 people, included in these suburbs are a mix of commercial businesses ranging from medium to very high risk enterprises which require quick effective response times.

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. Additionally, it will ensure the safety of our firefighters and stop the ever increasing and unrealistic demand being placed on volunteer firefighters because of the enormous urban growth resulting in increased emergency calls.

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. Too often I have seen the horrible side of cancer that has taken on my fellow colleagues, both in the physical form but also the mental and financial strain on family members. For too long this issue has been skirted around, the evidence is there, it is now time to act. 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. I would also welcome the opportunity to meet with you in person to talk to you further about my personal experiences as a professional firefighter and why this reform is so important.

Kind regards
Paul Murphy
Leading Firefighter
Croydon Fire Station
[REDACTED]