

Assistant Clerk Committees
Department of the Legislative Council
Fire Services Bill Select Committee
Parliament House, Spring Street
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

28 June 2017

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

Confidential Submission

I would like to explain to you why I support fire service reform – I support it because I hope it will end the nightmare of the past 18 months.

Over the last 18 months I have witnessed unprecedented attacks on my husband and brother by the media, CFA volunteers and by members of the Victorian Liberal and National parties to vilify men and women who have opted to protect lives and property as career firefighters. I have felt the full force of their humiliation and distress throughout the process.

Career firefighters (my husband, my brother and their colleagues) have been labelled THUGS, BULLY'S, SEXIST, DRUNKS, UFU CRIMINALS, SCUM, DOGS all of which is untrue. Last year a career firefighter on my husband's shift was publicly abused and handed a bullet by a member of the public (for career staff and the Premier) while fundraising alongside volunteer firefighters. I have also been labelled a UFU stooge and sympathizer.

Last year at the Traralgon integrated fire station during the end of year Christmas barbecue a volunteer referred to the career firefighters on duty as 'assholes'.

The toll that this abuse from the media, liberal/national politicians and CFA volunteers has taken has been extensive. At home, I have witnessed the frustration, anger and despair surrounding countless overt attempts to undermine and derail the efforts, need and desire of the UFU and career firefighters to protect their community. It is difficult to escape, it dominates news bulletins, social media, newspapers and talkback radio.

My husband, has been a career firefighter for nearly 40 years, he was also a volunteer for 5 years before he became a career firefighter. My husband has treated all volunteers with the utmost respect that most of them deserve, it breaks my heart to have the media, politicians and volunteers to continually vilify him and his colleagues in this way.

My husband has been a senior station officer at the Traralgon Fire Brigade for 18 ½ years. Over many years my husband would come home from work frustrated and annoyed due to only one or two volunteers turning out to a fire call, and many times no volunteers have turned out to fire calls. Many times, my husband has been called into work because no volunteers have responded to fire calls, resulting in the need for staff to be recalled supporting the on-duty crew.

As Traralgon is an integrated station, staff, volunteers and their partners are invited to the annual dinner and Christmas barbecue, I have lost count the number of times my husband has said he has no idea who the volunteer is that is receiving the 'years of service' recognition medal because he has never seen these volunteers in the 18 years that he has worked at the Traralgon Fire Station. Other volunteers you only see when the Traralgon Fire Brigade has a social event on, whether it is the annual dinner or Christmas barbecue, you don't see these volunteers at the brigade training nights or at fire calls. My husband will often prepare and plan training for the volunteers in his own time and I can see how frustrated he is when he comes home and tells you only two or three volunteers and at times no volunteers attended training that night.

I support the fire services reform. I support the move for career firefighters from both CFA and MFB to be merged into Fire Rescue Victoria. Our career firefighters need to be properly resourced to deliver to the community a service for which they are entitled to, and so my husband, brother and their colleagues can return home safely to their families and without being vilified and abused.

[REDACTED]