

Chris NapierCountry Fire Authority
Springvale Fire Station**▶ Assistant Clerk Committees****Department of the Legislative
Council Fire Services Bill Select
Committee Parliament House,
Spring Street EAST MELBOURNE**

**INQUIRY INTO THE FIREFIGHTERS' PRESUMPTIVE RIGHTS COMPENSATION
AND FIRE SERVICES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (REFORM) BILL 2017****Dear Assistant Clerk Committees,**

I am writing to express my support for the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017. This Bill will allow for Victorian Fire Services to be progressive and modernised, with one career (paid) fire service providing coverage to the rapidly growing urban areas of Melbourne, whilst allowing the Country Fire Authority to become a fully volunteer fire service with strong direction and greater cohesiveness. I believe that this reform will not only improve efficiencies throughout all fire service delivery across the state, but will allow the CFA to better manage the recruitment, training and development of its large volunteer workforce in serving the needs of country Victoria.

I am a professional firefighter at Springvale CFA, and have been a career firefighter for over 4 years. I have worked across the state of Victoria and have gained a sound understanding of the current challenges facing the fire services today. With a rapidly growing population and ever increasing urban area, Victoria has outgrown the existing Fire Service structures. Whilst there will always be a place for volunteers in Victoria's fire services, it is paramount that the fire services are reformed to allow for a progressive and adapting service to serve the urban areas. I have had many personal experiences, whilst working for the CFA, where the current model of service delivery has demonstrated severe shortfalls. With the workload in areas such as Springvale and many other areas served by CFA increasing steadily, the reliance on volunteers is becoming more and more of an issue.

In my job as a firefighter, my workplace can be anything from a house fire, a car accident scene, a hazardous materials incident, an emergency medical incident or many other situations, and for each of these scenarios I should have the right to feel safe in my workplace. With the current model of fire service delivery, we are not always guaranteed a backup crew of adequately trained firefighters in a timely manner. Volunteers will always take longer than staff to respond, due to the simple fact that they need to respond to the fire station first. This is the first barrier to preventing our backup from arriving in the most critical minutes of an incident. There is an ever

increasing demand on the fire services, and the face of volunteering is changing, with employers not always willing for workers to leave for firecalls, and the issue of volunteers having to achieve a healthy work/life/volunteering balance. All urban areas that have outgrown the capacity of volunteer response need to be properly serviced by a professional fire service that can guarantee 2 firetrucks with appropriately trained crew in the first few minutes of an unfolding emergency situation. This will ensure crew safety, particularly for those crew who turn up initially and require support.

The amount of time that professional firefighters spend acquiring and maintaining an extremely diverse range of skills suited to the dynamic nature of urban firefighting cannot be expected of volunteers. These skills include search and rescue, residential firefighting, commercial/industrial firefighting, motor vehicle accident rescue, industrial rescue, HAZMAT response, emergency medical response, specialist appliances, driving heavy vehicles under emergency conditions, advanced hydraulics/pumping, knowledge of fire detection and suppression systems, presenting community safety information and many other skills. In order to be proficient at our jobs, professional firefighters will train every single day they are working. Whilst there are some very experienced volunteers within CFA, it is an unfair burden to expect that they will acquire and maintain skills to the same level as professional firefighters.

I believe that the proposed reform allows for more efficient and cost effective management and administration of career firefighters in Victoria, resulting in better service to the community. As a firefighter, my primary focus is ensuring that the community is best served by their fire services. I strongly believe that this reform would improve community safety immediately, and would allow for the fire services to keep progressing and adapting to better serve the community. It is my opinion that the Country Fire Authority will be a more harmonious and productive organisation once they are a volunteer only fire service. This gives the volunteers greater ownership and responsibility in their brigades, and can allow for better training frameworks that are based around an entirely volunteer firefighter base.

Thank you for considering my submission and I hope you can support this Bill that will allow Victoria to have the modern and progressive fire services that the community deserves.

Chris Napier
Qualified Fire Fighter
CFA Springvale
7/1/2017