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Friday, 30th June 2017
Assistant Clerk Committees
Department of the Legislative Council
Fire Services Bill Select Committee
Parliament House, Spring Street
EAST MEELBOURNE VIC 3002
LCSC@parliament.vic.gov.au

Dear Fire Services Bill Select Committee Members,

Re: Fire Service Bill

My name is Stacey Hayes.

I am an **Advanced Life Support Paramedic** employed by **Ambulance Victoria**. I have 23 years of experience working in the Ambulance field as both a Communications Officer and a Paramedic. I have watched the Ambulance Services evolve from the individual rural regions, through to Rural Ambulance Victoria and Metropolitan Ambulance to the Ambulance Victoria we now have. At the time these changes were taking place, there were many misgivings and lots of naysayers, but with the benefit of hindsight, the amalgamation and modernising of all the many services has finally, with the multitude of improvements in the last 3 years, been good for Victorians and ambulance personnel.

I have worked in many areas outside of Melbourne. These include the larger towns of Geelong, Ballarat and Mildura and also the smaller areas such as Colac, Warracknabeal, St Arnaud, Horsham, Ballan, Daylesford, Ararat and Stawell. During that time I have gained extensive experience working with my CFA colleagues, both Career and Volunteer.

I have watched career fire-fighters run into burning buildings. I have watched as they repelled down a cliff face to get to injured patients. I have sat beside them in the back of mangled cars while we held the hands of the injured or dying, and did our best to keep them alive. I have delivered EMR (emergency medical response) training to them and I have knelt beside them as they performed CPR compressions on a patient so my hands were free to deliver potentially live saving drugs and manage the defibrillator. I know what they do, I have seen it first-hand time and again, they are professional and they are dedicated, and they are some of the best men and women I have known. (Yes, I am

aware that there are many volunteers that can also perform these tasks, but in my varied and extensive personal experience I have witnessed these tasks performed by career firefighters in at least 90% of the time).

From a **paramedic view point**, I have documented below some of my own personal experiences, where the correct and immediate dispatch of professional fire-fighters has worked well and times when NOT having the correct resources put paramedics and patients in danger of further harm.

- For example, imagine a patient half submerged in the water at the bottom of a cliff on the Murray River's edge. The patient is severely injured and time is of the essence. The paramedics call for CFA back-up, emphasising the need for the Mildura staff and continue working. Approximately 10 minutes later one of the volunteer brigades arrives. Although these people are very dedicated and passionate, they do not have the training or equipment to be able to repel down the cliff with a stretcher and then get the patient back up. So a further request is put in, before finally the Mildura career fire-fighters are on scene. That's a 15-20 minute delay, down to the dispatching system that caters for demarcation issues, that is currently in place.
- While working in Ballarat, I attended a serious car accident just outside of Ballarat, where the patient was trapped and there was smoke issuing from under the car. We called for rescue and fire back-up. The Rescue vehicle was 10 minutes away. After being paged 3 times they finally arrived 40 minutes after we requested them. The Fire appliance took a full 60 minutes to arrive from the time of request. Probably lucky that the smoking car, that was LPG fuelled, didn't decide to actually catch fire. The really horrendous thing about this entire debacle was that Ballarat City career fire-fighters were in their station less than a 5 minute drive away but were never dispatched. Why?? Because the accident was approximately 500 metres inside a rural brigade's area and being a Saturday night the volunteers from the Rescue brigade probably had better things to do (not a criticism, just a statement of fact). The Ballarat City crews could have performed the rescue and looked after things from a fire perspective long before the volunteer Rescue vehicle even arrived. Ballarat is a large town. The volunteers in the area do a fantastic job when they can, but realistically they cannot be expected to be available as quickly as the career staff. Surely a rural City like Ballarat, with that many rate payers needs to be better resourced? Also from a purely personal standpoint, why were paramedics forced to place their own safety at risk

purely to satisfy the out-dated dispatching and protocol system that can sometimes see egos placed before community safety.

- Regularly CFA professional fire-fighters from integrated stations arrive at scenes before ambulances. I attended a multi-vehicle collision, on a large highway, which unfortunately resulted in the death of two people. When my colleague and I arrived, there were already 2 fire-trucks on scene which had blocked the highway, protecting all of the patients that were trapped, as well as ourselves. Before I had even gotten out of the ambulance I was met by a Senior Station Officer who was able to give me a succinct and accurate situation report. I was then able to immediately request extra resources, including rescue, saving somewhere between 2 to 5 minutes of having to obtain all of the information myself. As I approached the scene I saw an EMR qualified fire-fighter had climbed into the back of one of the mangled cars and was comforting a seriously injured patient while providing neck stabilisation. I saw 2 other firefighters disabling air-bags in both vehicles, while another was standing with a fire hose ready, just in case. As soon as I identified which patient needed extrication first, the fire-fighters began stabilising and preparing the car in preparation for the arrival of SES, who were still several minutes away. Over the next 30 minutes, the ambulance keys were handed to fire-fighters who readied stretchers, prepared spinal equipment, changed oxygen cylinders and assisted with patient treatment. Their extra knowledge, training, skills and their ability to get to the scene so quickly was invaluable. They worked well with us, the SES volunteers and the local CFA volunteers that assisted after our arrival.

Implementation of the FRV means that paramedics and police can bypass the political mess that is quite often CFA.

If I know that I need, high-angle rescue, EMR, specific equipment only found on the career staff vehicles, then I can just ask for FRV back-up. If I need the closest assistance due to a fire, or more hands, or someone to drive the ambulance, then I can ask for CFA assistance. The confusion and demarcation issues would be gone and it would mean better patient outcomes.

Please don't think I am anti-volunteer. I definitely am not. I have worked besides some truly awesome volunteer fire-fighters from many different areas. The volunteers at places such as Colac are just fantastic when it comes to protecting and serving the community (there are many others, but they come to mind as top of my list, purely from personal experience). I have volunteered my own time and delivered some training packages to volunteer brigades including ambulance familiarisation. Why? Because when I contacted them to thank them for their invaluable assistance

at a car accident (sometimes holding a torch, or comforting a patient are more useful than you know) they were apologetic that they couldn't help more because of a lack of knowledge, regarding how to use some of the ambulance lifting equipment. These people really are the life blood of rural Victoria and we would be lost without them.

But in the larger rural towns and Melbourne areas, we need to move forward. EMR, RAR capabilities and increased numbers being dispatched to incidents that are currently part of the integrated brigade areas are so very important for the community. Countless lives will be saved, there is no doubt.

Please look at how far Ambulance Victoria has come. Since the current CEO took over the reins, the changes have been immense. He has obtained feedback from the people at the coal face, implemented many of their suggestions, and now we have better response times, increased cardiac arrest survival (now the best in the country), and are spending much less time ramped in hospitals with non-urgent cases. By having a management that validated the concerns of those actually providing the care and attending the patients, Ambulance Victoria has been able to reach new heights as well as implementing new skills, drugs and equipment that have saved countless Victorian lives. An enviable record after only 3 years.

I am informed that the professional fire-fighters within CFA, attend to an average of 66% of all the cases generated throughout Victoria on any given day. That is a phenomenal amount given that they make up approximately 3% of the workforce. Surely the people doing most of the work should be able to have some input into the future of Victoria's fire services? Sadly, with the current board specifications of 4 VFBV representatives and no staff representatives, this can never be the case.

I believe I am in a unique position to offer a completely different perspective into the FRV issue for the following reasons:

- As an experienced Advanced Life Support Paramedic, I have first-hand experience and the clinical knowledge that shows why the creation of Fire Rescue Victoria, is imperative and long overdue.
- As a paramedic I have felt the despair and futility when political factions, the rabid VFBV, and mainstream media, have criticised and labelled fire-fighters as thugs, for asking for improved safety for themselves and the community. Indeed, this was exactly the campaign that David Davis ran against paramedics throughout 2013 & 2014. It is soul-destroying to be so attacked and abused by the very people that we dedicate our working lives to.
- I am also the very proud wife of a passionate and dedicated career fire-fighter. He has 25 years of service with the CFA (both as a volunteer and as a career officer) as well as a further 10 years of service as a career fire-fighter in other states.

We have three sons, aged 14, 11 and 2, whom we hope will grow up to be as civic minded as we are, no matter which paths they choose in their adult lives. Our oldest boy is currently a member of the Mildura Fire Brigade's running team and is regularly away at VFBV championships over the summer months. His involvement with the volunteers at Mildura has given him great confidence and self-esteem, things so important during his teenage years.

As the wife of a career fire-fighter, I accept that my husband has a dangerous job. I fully understand that what he does could well see him injured or killed. Sadly, due to my own profession, I know very well how dangerous it can be.

I know my husband. I know that if he arrives at a structure fire and there are concerns for people inside, he will done BA (breathing apparatus) and go inside the building to search. I am proud that my husband is that kind of man, but it also gives me great concern. I worry because I also know that he will not wait to see if a further appliance with more BA operators is on the way (as happens routinely in MFB areas), before he enters the building. I know I am not alone in this concern. I have talked to many spouses of fire-fighters and it is something that we know that they will ALL do.

It was disgusting that one of the issues that people had with the original EBA was the DISPATCH of 7 fire-fighters. I have to believe that these people were simply unable to comprehend the difference between DISPATCH and ARRIVAL. Having 7 fire-fighters (even if 3 are still on the way), would mean that if something happened to my husband when he entered that burning building there would be 2 more BA operators on scene to help him and get him out or they are on the way and will be there very shortly.

At the moment there is no way for ESTA to differentiate who is on a CFA volunteer vehicle, what qualifications they have, and how long it will take them to be able to get to the station and be on their way. That is not a criticism of volunteers. I have nothing but respect for those who give of their own time to assist their community and try to make things better for others. However, it is a realistic view of how a system that relies on the good intentions of volunteers, works. Sometimes, people just can't make it. Sometimes, they are out of town, they are unable to leave work or the kids, or lo and behold might have been relaxing with a beer or two. So many perfectly acceptable and normal reasons why they may not be able to respond when the pager goes off, they are allowed to have a life, just like everyone else.

My husband should also be allowed to have a life. He should be able to go to work knowing that if push comes to shove there WILL be fire-fighters there, that they WILL have the necessary qualifications and experience for the task at hand. He should be able to negotiate for improved health and safety without the constant interference, vilification and bullying from organisations like the VFBV. He should be secure in the knowledge that if he gets cancer, he will be covered by Presumptive Legislation, and be able to concentrate on fighting it, rather than worrying for his family's security.

These people deserve to have improved safety, the community deserves it, and my children deserve to have their father being as safe as practicable in a dangerous job.

I hope that you see fit to help push our fire services into the 21st century so that they too can achieve the vast improvements that Ambulance Victoria has gained in the last few years. As a paramedic, a

wife and mother, I ask that you recommend that the new Fire Rescue Victoria and CFA organisations are up and running as soon as possible.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to discuss my submission in person if required.

Stacey Hayes



Easter 2016