

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees

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

My name is Matthew Brown. I am a firefighter with the Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB) and have been a full-time firefighter for 5 years. I am currently stationed at Carlton Fire station and have previously worked in the southern based stations of Clayton and Mentone.

I am in full support of the proposed fire services reforms.

At present, I work in the inner Melbourne areas but unfortunately live in an outer suburban or regional area with my young family. It is sad that my family and I do not have the same protection as those living in inner city areas covered by the MFB. We pay the same fire service levy and have the same infrastructure, such as large hospitals, schools, factories, power stations but have inadequate protection and procedures.

The population growth and urbanisation of the greater metropolitan and regional areas has been exponential. I find it unbelievable that despite all this growth, the fire service boundaries have not significantly changed in almost 60 years. That means that those people living in urbanised areas in high growth outer suburbs and regional cities don't get the same coverage that is provided in the inner to middle Melbourne suburbs. I believe that the communities in areas such as Frankston and Geelong deserve (and pay for) a full-time fire service, with two appliances with a minimum seven firefighters responding within 8 minutes. I have seen first-hand the enormous difference a few minutes can have in emergency situations such as structural fires or emergency medical response.

During time stationed at Clayton with the MFB, I was involved in firefighting operations with integrated CFA stations such as Springvale. These are examples of fire stations that have moved from rural volunteer operations to integrated urban fire brigades due to population growth over the past few decades. These areas must have better responses and with the proposed fire service reforms they will come into line with the current MFB response. Professionally, if I was a firefighter in a current CFA integrated station, I would want to know that I had a fully trained crew on a second appliance arriving within minutes of my appliance for any fire, rescue or incident. At present, there is no such guarantee and I feel it is an unacceptable risk for firefighters and the wider community.

CFA volunteers play a very important part in our rural firefighting capacity. Each time I am turned out as part of a strike team to rural areas for major bushfires I am willing and happy to support them and work with them. These reforms have no impact on the volunteer

service (in fact they include features to assist with recruitment, retention and funding) and all to do with better protecting Victoria.

Finally, there has been some consternation within the ranks of career firefighters that making a submission to this committee be seen as a breach of the Code of Conduct for Victorian Public Sector Employees. Specifically Clause 3.5 of the Code that states “When making a comment in a private capacity, public sector employees [must] ensure their comments are not related to any government activity that they are involved in or connected with as a public sector employee...”. I’ve been assured that I make this submission under the protection of parliamentary privilege and request that my views remain the confidential property of this committee. I do not wish to denigrate or cast aspersions on anyone associated with the Victorian fire services and firmly believe that this moment presents us all with an opportunity to create a far more capable and robust fire service that will benefit the people and state of Victoria.

Yours Sincerely
Matthew Brown