

4/7/2017

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees,

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

I write to express my support for the long overdue reforms to Victoria's fire services.

My name is [REDACTED] and I am a Leading Firefighter and qualified Rescue Operator employed by the MFB and currently stationed at Carlton Fire Station. I am writing to you in support of the proposed legislation and Fire Services Reform. I have been a career firefighter with the MFB for over 5 years and currently reside in Parkdale.

I have seen and experienced first hand just how essential it is to have an appropriately trained, ready-to-respond fire service in what is currently Melbourne's metropolitan fire district. The fact that in 2017, such a large portion of Melbourne's sprawling metropolis and Victoria's ever expanding regional cities fall outside of this district I find of genuine concern.

I wish to draw your attention to three considerations I believe should be at the forefront of the decisions made by this committee:

Medical Emergencies

In the five years I've worked as a firefighter, I've responded to numerous medical emergencies including cardiac arrests, drug overdoses, car, bus, tram and train accidents in which occupants have either been deceased, injured and/or trapped. These incidents are time critical. A delay of mere minutes can mean the difference between life and death. The EMR Program has been in place at the MFB since 2001. In a 2015 media release (www.mfb.vic.gov.au/News/MFB-firefighters-attending-increasing-number-of-medical-calls.html), the then Chief Fire Officer Peter Rau stated that "Our firefighters have helped to save more than 200 lives through this service".

In 2011, a good friend's father had a heart attack and died at his home in Eltham. He was in his mid 50s when he passed away. If the local Eltham CFA Fire Station had the EMR Program as does its MFB counterpart in nearby Greensborough and had he received the necessary life saving support, the outcome may have been different. To this day, I cannot understand how a built up suburb like Eltham does not have the EMR Program at their local CFA station. How do you explain that to your friend? How do you explain that to her family and relatives that live in that area? I find it unconscionable that in 2017 we base Victoria's level of emergency response on boundaries, systems and structures that were drawn up more than 60 years ago.

Structure fires

Responding to fires that occur in houses, apartments, workplaces, schools and hospitals is the core function of fire services. A well established system of ensuring the safety of both the occupants of these buildings, and the firefighters who attend is to send a minimum of seven firefighters. Unlike inner Melbourne, this response is not guaranteed in areas like Geelong, Bendigo, Frankston, Shepparton, Dandenong, and Point Cook. These densely populated areas contain among other things high rise developments, major hospitals, universities, and large shopping centres. These regions and their residents are deserving of the exact same coverage that exists in inner Melbourne.

Last month a well publicised fire took hold of the Grenfell residential tower in England. This fire took place in west London, crews were on scene within 6 minutes, more than 500 people live in the tower, 80 of which lost their lives. The fire accelerated rapidly due largely to the combustible cladding on the building's facade. This material has been found to be present on a number of buildings throughout Melbourne and Victoria. I believe it is incumbent on this committee to consider the ramifications of a compromised emergency response to any incident that takes place in the densely populated regions of the state.


Surge Capacity

I have read with interest the threats from some that this restructure will have a detrimental effect on the state's fire service's surge capacity when responding to significant events. I find this argument offensive. When events such as Black Saturday, the Hazelwood coal mine fire, even the 'asthma storm' of November 21, 2016 occur the furthest thing from the mind of emergency responders is organisational structures or the alignment of the fire services. Our prime focus is to protect life and property to the best of our training and ability. I personally have responded to events alongside responders from Ambulance Victoria, Victoria Police, the SES, and CFA both career and volunteer. I have done so and will continue to do so without hesitation many more times throughout my career. I'm filled with admiration for the thousands of people who volunteer as part of Victoria's fire response. The selflessness of their actions I find commendable. The implication that due to the proposed restructure, that these same volunteers would decide en masse not to make themselves available to support their communities during a time of crisis I not only hope but unwaveringly believe to be a misrepresentation of their intent.

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.

I am more than willing to be contacted for any clarification or queries relating to this submission.

Regards,

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature and name of the author.