

Assistant Clerk Committees
Department of the Legislative Council
Fire Service Bill Select Committee
Parliament House, Spring Street
East Melbourne Vic 3002

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees

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

My name is Dale Waterson. I am a Leading Firefighter with the MFB and have been a full-time firefighter for almost 9 years. I am currently stationed at Thomastown Fire Station on C Platoon. Prior to this, I have worked at Eastern Hill, Broadmeadows, Greensborough, Pascoe Vale and Epping.

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

I currently live in the Northern growth corridor of Mernda with my young family and do not feel safe with the fire brigade response currently offered in my area. My closest permanently manned fire station is South Morang which is approximately 10 – 15 minutes away on a quiet day. With the amount of new estates and houses in my area the roads are constantly clogged with traffic and gridlock would mean a severely delayed fire response. Volunteers from Mernda, Doreen and Whittlesea do a fantastic job but they are simply not able to quickly get to their fire station and then to an incident with traffic the way it is.

I find it unbelievable that despite all this growth, the fire service boundaries have not significantly changed. That means that people in my area, as well as 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 South Morang, 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 the development of a structural fire or the progression of a cardiac arrest.

During time stationed at Greensborough and Epping with the MFB, I was involved in firefighting operations with integrated CFA stations such as Eltham and South Morang. 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.

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. I have responded to events such as Black Saturday, the Hazelwood coal mine fire, even the 'asthma storm' of November 21, 2016 and the furthest thing from the mind of emergency responders is organisational structures or the alignment of the fire services. Rather our prime focus is the protection of 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 did so without hesitation and will no doubt do so 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, 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.

Regards,

LFF Dale Waterson

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