

05/07/17

To the members of the Fire Services Reform Select Committee,

My name is Andrew Stephenson and I am a current resident of Werribee as well as a Station Officer of 27 years service with the Melbourne Fire Brigade.

I write to regarding the proposed changes to our fire services. I grew up in Laverton before moving to Hoppers Crossing then Werribee where I currently live with my family. I have also been a firefighter stationed at Laverton Fire Station for the bulk of my career. My opinions on this important matter come from my perspective both as a resident in an area serviced by the CFA, as well as someone who has worked on the CFA/MFA border for many years. I have watched the changes in the area, particularly the last 20 years, with an amazing amount of urban growth being the largest factor. I believe the current fire service model does not adequately cater for these changes, with the city of Wyndham being a classic example. I do not wish to denigrate the work of volunteers in any way, as I have worked alongside and seen the fantastic work they do. But I believe the area I live needs more resources, particularly in the area of full time staff, to ensure adequate fire coverage at all times. Again I refer back to my own area, as I know this best. Currently the city of Wyndham has only one staffed firefighting appliance, whilst the other areas of Werribee, Wyndhamvale, Tarneit and the many new developments in the area have none at all. I do not believe that a fully volunteer service can provide the service required, particularly in the busy times of modern society. With the ever increasing amount of industry and homes on the urban fringe, and with the traffic and congestion this brings, it is imperative we implement change in the way fire service delivery is being undertaken.

I recently completed a course in fire behaviour, which showed how modern buildings, particularly residential homes see fire spread much quicker than those of previous generations, due to the materials we now use as well as there being a lot more combustible product in the home. This highlights the need for the quickest possible response from our fire services.

With the dangers of modern firefighting in mind, I also would like to highlight the importance to my colleagues and I of the need for presumptive legislation. We have all had to experience the sorrow of losing work mates to various forms of cancer that statistics show we are at a higher risk of contracting due to our field of work. I hope that this legislation is passed so that we receive the support needed should these circumstances arise.

In closing, I believe both as a resident of the city of Wyndham and as a career firefighter of 27 years, that fire service reform is needed and long overdue so that we can ensure all Victorians receive the protection they deserve.

With Regards,

Andrew Stephenson

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