

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees

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

My name is Simon Taylor. I am a Leading Fire Fighter with the MFB and have been a full-time firefighter for 10 years. I am currently stationed at Eastern Hill on C Platoon and have worked between this station and Carlton Fire station for the majority of my career. I have also spent some time around various Northern Stations.

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

At present, I live in Macleod and am very fortunate to have the full service of the MFB as a resident if needed.

Victoria's fire services boundaries have not changed significantly in 60 years. Under this outdated system, 35 areas are wrongly zoned as 'country', despite being heavily urbanised and residential. Frankston, Cranbourne, Dandenong, Craigieburn, Melton, Springvale, Boronia and Geelong are just some of the 35 'country areas'.

These areas need to be modernised as they are highly urbanised areas as part of the reform of the fire service. A rapid 8 minute response, with 7 professional career firefighters on two fire trucks is the minimum standard needed in highly urbanised areas.

All Victorian, professional and volunteer firefighters, deserve modern fire services that meet the needs of our growing communities.

To ensure the safety of all Victorians - including me as a firefighter, I ask you to please seriously consider your support for the proposed fire services reform.

Reform of our fire services will ensure the safety of your constituents, and all communities in our growing state. Additionally, it will ensure the safety of our firefighters and stop the ever increasing and unrealistic demand being placed on volunteer firefighters because of the enormous urban growth resulting in increased emergency calls.

I have lived in Melbourne all my life and have seen the population growth and urbanisation of the greater metropolitan and regional areas throughout my 43 years. I find it unbelievable that despite all this growth, the fire service boundaries have not significantly changed in almost double that time. 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 the development of a structural fire or the progression of a cardiac arrest. 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.

In the ten 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 been injured and/or trapped. These incidents are time critical. A delay of mere minutes can and does literally cost lives. This system has been in place since 2001 and in a 2015 media release (www.mfb.vic.gov.au/News/MFB-firefighters-attending-increasing-number-of-medical-calls.html), then Chief Fire Officer Peter Rau stated "had saved more than 200 lives" 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.

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.

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. 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. 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, I want to convey to the Committee the emotional toll this ongoing dispute has had on both my colleagues and me. What began as an EBA negotiation has turned into a public, politically-driven agenda with little regard for the major issue at hand – public safety. When making your recommendations and vote, please make this your deciding factor.

Yours Sincerely

Simon Taylor

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