

Kirra Vanzetti

From: Sam Wake [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, 6 July 2017 12:15 PM
To: LCSC
Subject: Fire service reform

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees,

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

My name is Samantha Tosch and I am a career firefighter with the Country Fire Authority. I am currently 32 years old and I have been employed with the CFA as a career firefighter for 12 months now. I am stationed at Rosebud fire station as an above strength firefighter, on the Southern Mornington Peninsula and I live in Frankston.

I am writing this submission in support of the proposed reform of the fire services for the following reasons:

- There have been discussions around the importance of having '7 on the fire ground'. This is paramount in ensuring the safety of crew members- both career and volunteer. Obviously it is not guaranteed that volunteers will respond, and furthermore, if they have the skill competencies required for the incident. Therefore stations that have a minimum manning of less than seven have no guarantee they will have adequate back up at a going job. If for example our Rosebud crew of four attended a house fire with possible or known persons trapped inside, we would not be able to enter the building without another crew present for safety measures to try to rescue the casualties. If we had a guaranteed seven career firefighters dispatched and on scene, we would know we have the back up to perform our task safely and efficiently.
- Changes such as this will not prevent volunteer firefighters to respond. It will not prevent them from being active on the fire ground and it will not alter their dispatch. It will simply ensure the public have the known security that their property is being protected in the best and most effective way possible, at ALL times. After all, safety for the community is the overall goal of an effective fire service.
- Currently the Captain of a Volunteer only fire station has the power to prevent career fire fighters from entering their territory for a fire call. They have the power to respond only the crews they wish to attend and cancel other crews at any time. This means if a neighbouring volunteer brigade has a serious job and no one responds, or the personnel who do respond are not qualified or competent to complete the tasks required, a time of 6 minutes can pass before the next brigades will be dispatched. A career fire crew is guaranteed to get out the door in 90 seconds. A volunteer brigade is given 6 minutes before they are deemed not to have responded. This is not in the best interests of the community as they presume the quickest and closest responders will be attending, no matter what time of day or location they are in.
- The new structure will not affect volunteers from turning out in any way and will certainly not affect bushfire response and campaign fires. It will simply guarantee better protection for community members who live in the ever growing urban sprawl of outer metropolitan Melbourne and bigger regional towns. This is where growing infrastructure, highly urbanised and high residential areas present greater risks than ever before.
- Having career firefighters all coming under the one banner of one fire service would create greater consistency across the state. This would mean better efficiency across all personnel. Currently we have

different trucks, different radios, different equipment and different procedures making it hard to cross over between the fire services. Consistency would make things quicker and easier for fire crews, ensuring the safety of the community.

- The continued disputation in the workplace has caused ongoing damage to my wellbeing. I have been approached on shift by members of the public who are ill informed and have a lack of understanding regarding the dispute who criticise our crew, just because they see we are career firefighters. I have felt the strain on station between career and volunteer firefighters. I have the ongoing strain on my mental health regarding my work environment with ongoing unrest and uncertainty. I believed I was entering a career where people viewed my role in a positive light, however this dispute is making me out to be a villain and a 'thug'. I have only been in this job for one year and I intend on enjoying a long and happy career, however this dispute has certainly put a dampener on the beginning of it. Even during my recruit course in 2016 we had the uncertainty of if we would graduate as CFA firefighters or under another organisation. Now nearly 12 months later there is still discrepancy, uncertainty and no change.

Below are examples which demonstrate the failures of the current structure:

- The Mornington career firefighters are restricted in every direction around them to respond into areas under a neighbouring volunteer stations area. In particular, this applies to emergency medical response. This means my sister who lives 3.8km away do not get a guarantee of the fastest responder attending an EMR emergency as her location is not in the Mornington primary area, it is a support area.
- The Captain at the Dromana fire station refuses Rosebud to respond into their area after 6pm. This means my dad who lives in Dromana, 8.2 km from our station is not protected by a guarantee that someone will attend. If we respond during the day, and Dromana does get a crew out the door they will automatically cancel the Rosebud staff when they step into the truck. This means they are cancelling our team BEFORE they have even arrived on scene.
- The Dromana Captain responds to calls in his own vehicle. Therefore he radio's through that Dromana are on scene as this gives him control of the situation. However it also means that there is not even a truck at the job as yet!
- There have been a number of jobs where we have heard over the radio of local volunteer brigades turning out with only one or two people. This does not give the assured back up we would require if expecting to enter a premises safely.
- There have been a number of times when on route to a job where we are informed that local volunteer brigades have 'failed to respond' at all. This means that the next closest brigade will be paged, 6 minutes after the initial call. There are still no guarantees that this next brigade will be able to respond either.
- Many local brigades run appliances that are older and less equipped than the staffed appliance we run out of Rosebud. Therefore, in the locations that are only covered by volunteer brigades, they are not guaranteed the resources necessary for the job. For example, Dromana Secondary College is covered by Dromana and Red Hill volunteers. If there was a big structure fire at this location, Rosebud with the best equipment is not automatically called to the job, unless Dromana arrive on scene and decide they would like to then respond us. This causes significant time delays, potentially resulting in drastic damage to property and possibly lives.

The opportunity to contribute first hand to this reform proposal is important to me and my colleagues. I thank you for taking the time to consider each and every correspondence you receive regarding the matter. Reform is required to move Victoria forward with the safest Fire and Rescue response possible, to ensure the safety of all community members.

Yours sincerely,

Samantha Tosch (nee Wake).



Sam Wake Fire Fighter- A Platoon
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A promotional banner for the 2017 Fire Awareness Awards. It features the text 'ORDINARY PEOPLE. EXTRAORDINARY ACHIEVEMENTS.' on the left, a central logo of a house with a flame, and the text '2017 FIRE AWARENESS AWARDS'. On the right, it asks 'Have you or someone you know, developed a great fire project in your community?' and includes a large 'APPLY NOW' button. Further right, it states 'Entries close: 17 Sept 2017' and 'Supported by RACV' with the RACV logo.

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