

Kirra Vanzetti

From: Inquiry into the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017 [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, 6 July 2017 5:23 PM
To: LCSC
Subject: New Submission to Inquiry into the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017

Inquiry Name: Inquiry into the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017

Mr Christopher Selby-Slee
[REDACTED]

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SUBMISSION CONTENT:

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I wish to address the Senate Committee for the Inquiry into the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017. I thank the members of the Committee for the opportunity to provide input to this inquiry.

My name is Christopher Selby-Slee and I am a Qualified Firefighter with the Metropolitan Fire Brigade. Over the last four years, I have been stationed at South Melbourne, West Melbourne, Laverton North and Sunshine, where I am currently based.

I am in support of the proposed fire services reform. I would like to make particular mention of the need for presumptive legislation for multiple types of cancer and improvements to fire service in urban areas.

a) Impact on fire service delivery across Victoria

Melbourne's population is increasing, and fire service in some areas is struggling to keep up with the changes.

Councils of Casey, Hume, Melton, Whittlesea and Wyndham are flagged as future growth areas with the Victorian Planning Authority estimating a population growth of more than 600,000 people over the next fifteen years. There were approximately 22,700 residential lots sold across Melbourne's urban fringe in 2016 alone. The Australian Urban Research Infrastructure Network and RMIT's Centre for Urban Research expect strong future growth for areas in and around Cranbourne, Epping, Sunbury, Melton and Point Cook. Each of these areas are currently considered to be part of the country, although they are now clearly urban and only increasing in population.

Around the state, 35 integrated stations (with professional firefighters as well as volunteers) are responding to an extra 7,361 calls for assistance compared to a decade ago. The CFA system relies on volunteers to respond alongside full-time firefighters in order to safely deal with the emergency at hand. As there are more and more calls for assistance, the volunteers need to balance their work and family responsibilities with their commitment to the community. The volunteers are not to blame if they are not available for every call for help. We need changes to the system which ensure a fully professional response in highly urbanised areas, and still allow volunteers to protect their communities where the call numbers are low enough not to greatly impact their family lives and employment.

With the acceptance of this bill, I believe Victoria will receive an improved professional service in major centres and the wider Metropolitan District. Volunteer brigades across the state will maintain control of their areas, and continue to respond as they previously have. For integrated stations and volunteer-only stations which will eventually, as a result of the Fire District Review panel, become part of the Fire Rescue Victoria fire district; there is an opportunity to improve how volunteers are responded to emergencies. With full-time coverage in the Fire Rescue Victoria fire district, the volunteers on the fringe would not be required to respond immediately, but could be called on during major fires and emergencies as extra resources. This would also allow for those in MFB areas to become CFA volunteers, where previously they have lived too far away to respond.

d) Underlying policy rationale

The Australian Firefighters' Health Study by Monash University has demonstrated that full-time firefighters working longer than 20 years in the industry are at a significantly higher risk of contracting cancer than the general population.

By having presumptive legislation for certain types of cancers, the prior studies and history of the firefighter involved will demonstrate the cancer to be a result of firefighting. At a time where a lot of physical and psychological stress is applied to the firefighter with cancer, the presumptive legislation will reduce the added stress of having to prove which particular incidents led to the cancer.

I thank the Senate Committee, once again, for the opportunity to explain why I support the proposed changes and look forward to the result of this inquiry.

Sincerely,

Christopher Selby-Slee

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File1:

File2:

File3: