

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees,

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

My name is David Brereton and I have been involved with the CFA as both a career Fire-fighter and a Volunteer for over 15 years. I am currently stationed at Greenvale, but I have also worked at Craigieburn and Eltham fire stations, and before this I was a Volunteer (1st Lieutenant) at the Euroa Fire Brigade in the North East of Victoria.

I am writing to you to express my support for the proposed fire services reform.

In the areas I have worked during my time as a career fire fighter, I have seen first-hand the need for reform. The best and safest practice for structural fire fighting is to have seven appropriately qualified fire fighters (1 incident controller, 1 Pump operator, 1 for casualty management and 4 in Breathing Apparatus to conduct an internal attack on the fire) on scene within 8 minutes to begin operations. The model for response that the CFA currently operates under at integrated stations relies on volunteers to 'turnout' to make up the required support. Through no fault of their own, and not from a lack of effort or commitment, some volunteers have not been able to respond either at all or in a quick enough time frame. This strain places me and my colleagues under greater risk of injury or even death, as we don't have the appropriate backup in case the situation worsens. It also places additional strain on crews from other stations, and the communities that they serve, as they are then called in to make up the numbers.

I sincerely hope that you do not see this information as some sort of attack on the dedicated Volunteers that serve their communities exceptionally. As I have said, I was once a Volunteer and still would be if I lived in the CFA area. Many of my friends are Volunteers and heavily involved in the running of their brigade. They service the community that my family lives in and I fully understand their commitment and dedication to that community,

However times have changed in Victoria and there are many reasons why the integrated model is no longer a viable option. Many people no longer work in the communities that they live in, they may have had to move away all together to find employment, congestion on our roads is making it hard for Volunteers to respond in a timely manner and many employees can no longer afford to have their staff leave unexpectedly and be gone for an unknown amount of time.

It has been a long time since the fire service boundaries were established and since then there has been astonishing population and boundary growth in Victoria. Areas like Frankston, Cranbourne, Dandenong, Craigieburn, Melton, Springvale, Boronia, Geelong, Shepparton and Bendigo are no longer the quiet suburbs or towns they once were. Where an integrated or fully volunteer authority was once the best way to operate in these small towns and suburbs, they are now busy suburbs and towns and the fire service which serves them needs to grow and adapt with this change. The CFA is no longer just a country Fire Authority. Now is the time for reform. It is time to bring together all professional fire fighters into one fire service to provide the same level of service to all of the fast growing cities and towns around Victoria.

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

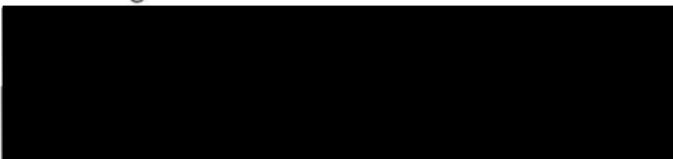
Reform of our fire services will ensure the safety of all communities in our growing state. Additionally, it will ensure the safety of all Fire-fighters, and stop the unrealistic demand being placed on Volunteers because of the increased number of emergency calls in growth areas.

I respectfully request that you give consideration to my request to modernise the fire service, and in doing so will:-

- Ensure the fast growing areas of the state have a guarantee that two trucks will responded with at least 7 fire-fighters on scene within 8 minutes.
- Will enshrine the CFA in law as a Volunteer based organisation protecting the surge capacity that is vital in major emergencies
- Prevent further political inference into Enterprise Bargaining Negotiations between Employee and Employer
- Will assist with standardisation of career training/specialist response/response standards and equipment etc.
- Will benefit volunteers as it has included a package to assist with volunteer recruitment and retention across the CFA; and includes funding for volunteer station upgrades etc.

As well as the important reforms to fire services in Victoria this bill also includes the introduction of presumptive legislation laws to protect all fire service members both Volunteer and career staff from the effects of certain cancers that we as fire-fighters are at a greater risk of contracting as a results of what we do. These issues need to be endorsed and implemented by Parliament before the commencement of the next fire season. It is increasingly important to the safety of me, my colleagues and all Victorians.

Signed

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature of David Brereton.

David Brereton