

Norm McWilliam JP



5 July 2017

Re: Inquiry into the Firefighter's Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017.

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees,

I am Acting Commander Norm McWilliam and work for the MFB where I have been a career firefighter for over 30 years. Currently I am the Acting Manager of the Building Inspection and Compliance Unit.

I hold the following qualifications: Diploma of Public Safety (Firefighting Management), Diploma of Management, Graduate member of the Institute of Fire Engineers (GradIFE), Associate Diploma Applied Science (Fire Technology), Certificate IV Fire Technology, Certificate in Fire Investigation and Certificate in Fire Safety Inspecting. I am also a member of the Victorian Association of Fire Investigators (MVAVI).

I am also a St John Ambulance volunteer and hold numerous qualifications including; Provide Pain Management (medications), Advanced first Aid, Advanced Resuscitation, Asthma Management, Anaphylaxis Management and at least 15 reaccreditation modules accrued each year.

I am very involved in my community in Werribee and am a Justice of the Peace, past Councilor candidate, past member of a council committee and a Masonic Lodge member.

I have been awarded the National Emergency Medal for carrying out first aid at the 2009 Bush Fires, The National Medal, MFB 25 year Long and Good Conduct medal, St John Ambulance Ribbon for nine years' service and am currently awaiting to be awarded my 12 year St John Ambulance Long Service medal.

I feel quite competent and qualified to comment on the issues mentioned below.

I live in Werribee which is a volunteer run CFA area although nearby we have co-location (career/volunteer) stations at Hoppers Crossing and Point Cook.

Werribee CFA do not have an Emergency Medical Reponse capability like their MFB counterparts in Metropolitan Melbourne and this has caused great personal concern and a family tragedy for me. Full time career staff may have made all the difference.

A large city of over 200, 000 people needs and deserves better than a volunteer fire service where time is wasted paging, responding from work or home, opening the station, waiting for a crew (Driver, Breathing Apparatus Qualified Firefighter, Structural Firefighting Qualified Firefighter, Qualified Officer, ect) to arrive and then finally turning out to the incident. So much potential time can be wasted. In the case of my local fire brigade, they don't even respond to assist in medical calls. If I lived in Melbourne I would get this so why shouldn't I get it at my home too?

It also concerns me about the increase in high rise apartments and office blocks proposed for the City of Wyndham, particularly the Werribee area. As a qualified Fire Safety Inspector and an Operational Fire Officer I am worried that the capability is not there now nor will be there into the future.

The volunteers need to assist the adjoining career staff brigades in structural firefighting and on at least one occasion at a concrete factory fire where I was a Sector Commander I had numerous volunteers who could not assist me due to not having breathing apparatus qualifications. This was in 2010 but I wonder if anything has changed and this concerns me that I cannot rely on their response for assistance.

We need to be assured that the fire ground has at least seven qualified career firefighters present and working within eight minutes to be effective and safe.

Employing all career firefighters together, particularly in my area around Point Cook, Hoppers Crossing, Laverton and Altona and all being qualified in the same way will ensure a seamless, safe and reliable emergency service. It will also increase the capacity to respond for services such as medical response, built environment fire safety and fire response capability.

Volunteer surge capacity would not need to change and support via professional staff already in existence such as Operations Managers, and Operations Officers would still be there.

My area in which I live is highly urbanized and should be maintained by a professional ready for immediate response career staff model.

My biggest concern occurred on 16 January 2017. My mother Melva McWilliam was living at the Mercy Place nursing home, approximately 800m and a two-minute drive from the Werribee CFA Station. She had a medical emergency and her heart stopped. Nursing Home staff called the Ambulance. For some reason unknown and still under investigation by the Coroner the ambulance never arrived.

Had this been in a MFB area with full time career staff, a fire truck would have been dispatched and arrived in maybe around four minutes. This never happened in Werribee and my mother died.

Why, living in Werribee do I have a second-class fire brigade system? It is not a small town in the middle of no-where. It is a quite a large town and needs a career staff model with guaranteed qualified staffing.

Regards,



Norm McWilliam JP