

Kirra Vanzetti

From: HOWLETT, Charles [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, 6 July 2017 11:38 PM
To: [REDACTED]
Cc: LCSC
Subject: Fire Service Bill Submission.

Dear Members of the Fire Service Bill selection committee,

My name is Charles Howlett and I am a career Fire fighter with the M.F.B (Metropolitan Fire and Emergency Services). Currently stationed at Fire Station 15 - Heidelberg.

I am writing to you in support of the proposed Fire Services Reform legislation. With community safety as our main priority I believe this reform will allow our Fire Services to modernise and adapt and ultimately provide better service to our community.

I grew up in Sale a country town in Gippsland where a lot of my friends and family still live. I am aware of the importance that the C.F.A (Country Fire Authority) has in country areas, I respect and admire our C.F.A Volunteers however I do believe the C.F.A should be allowed to focus on its legislated role as a volunteer-based fire service for country areas of Victoria. Also urban areas requiring a professional response should have it through a separate agency and not rely on our "Country" Fire Authority. As our current model dictates our Country Fire Authority are responsible for 60 percent of metropolitan Melbourne, and all regional cities.

When you need the Fire Brigade, you call Triple 0. If you are calling from an M.F.B (Metropolitan Fire Brigade), serviced area trucks are dispatched within seconds. Only in the part of Melbourne covered by the by the M.F.B at least two fire trucks are on route to the scene of the emergency within 90 seconds, Within a few minutes the first truck arrives. A pair of Fire Fighters will immediately prepare to get to work, search for anyone who might need rescuing and begin controlling the fire. The truck also carries an Officer in charge of the response, and a Fire Fighter tasked with securing a water supply and operating the pump. Entering a burning building poses numerous risks, so for safety a second pair of Fire Fighters are needed on stand-by fully kitted up and ready to assist if needed thus requiring the second truck. This type of response happens like clockwork every day in the MFB area. It's so effective that most fires are extinguished quickly, before they can spread beyond the room they started in - which can happen in a matter of minutes.

In the C.F.A (Country Fire Authority) area, the response to Triple 0 calls is very different.

The C.F.A's response model relies on volunteers, and when the Fire Brigade is needed in C.F.A area (Either Metropolitan or Country) two brigades are paged - that might be two volunteer brigades, one volunteer and one professionally staffed, or two professional brigades. When the pager sounds, those volunteers who are available make their way to the fire station. The hope is that, within four minutes the truck is ready to go, carrying a crew of four with the necessary qualifications to fight the fire, and arrives on-scene within 8 minutes.

All too often, Appliances take longer than the crucial 8 minutes to arrive on-scene and when they do it is possible they aren't carrying the appropriately skilled / qualified volunteers. It's easy to understand why - not all volunteers are available or even have the necessary qualifications. Other obstacles they need to overcome are driving a private vehicle under normal driving conditions (without lights and sirens) through suburban traffic to the fire station, putting on a uniform and getting out the door in four minutes, a very tough ask. When every second counts, delays of many minutes can cost lives. If the truck hasn't left the station within four minutes, it is deemed to have failed to respond. After a further few minutes another brigade is paged, and the clock and process start again. starts again.

In Victoria we must do better to keep people safe and the new proposals will help people living in densely populated urban areas. People living in C.F.A territory in metropolitan Melbourne can't take for granted that they will receive the same punctual, effective and efficient response that their neighbours living in MFB areas are guaranteed. This not only imperils public safety, it also places Fire Fighters at risk when that required back up or second brigade fails to respond.

The above highlighted issue is one of the major problems the C.F.A Enterprise Bargaining Agreement was meant to fix, at least partially, by stipulating that two staffed trucks are sent to any fires in the areas served by 32 of the busiest of the CFA's 1180 brigades. This Agreement has still not passed and in my opinion the structure of our fire services as they currently stand is just not working effectively. Practicality and economics dictates that we have a volunteer fire service for the bush and a professional fire service for metropolitan and busy urban areas.

If the Fire Services Reform is implemented volunteers and career fire fighters would be able to work together on the same fire ground for the good of all Victorians, and most importantly the public will get the best possible Fire Service to keep them safe.

Regards

Charles Howlett | Firefighter
Metropolitan Fire and Emergency Services Board

Heidelberg Fire Station 15

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