

Kirra Vanzetti

From: Ben King [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, 7 July 2017 12:34 PM
To: LCSC
Subject: Submission to the Fire Services Reform Select Committee

Name: **Benjamin Paul King** of [REDACTED]

Occupation: Station Officer, Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB), Melbourne 12 Years service.

I am happy for my submission to be made public.

I would like to submit the following points to the Fire Services Reform Select Committee for consideration.

#1 My first point is brief. In the time that I have worked at stations that border CFA areas, I have on a number of occasions, been responded into CFA areas for various incidents only to be turned back by a responding CFA volunteer brigade. This in itself is not an issue. The concern has been when the MFB response is down graded before CFA crews have arrived on scene and also when MFB response would be quicker than the first or second responding CFA crew. Unfortunately I cannot provide specific details to confirm my point, so this will have to be taken as anecdotal.

What I feel the reforms will do to alleviate this issue is to provide more consistent, predictable and appropriate responses in urban areas. It will eliminate confusion and inconsistency with assignment rules and ensure responses in built up areas are quicker and more coordinated thus ensuring a safer outcome to the public who live in those areas.

#2. My second point speaks to the issues that arise from adversarial and toxic relationships in emergency services. It's no secret that the fire services have experienced very lengthy periods of unrest and conflict over recent years. The toll that this has had on morale is very high. The damage that has been done to the respect for higher ranks is almost irreparable. The public perception of the fire services has also been severely damaged.

A number of years ago I lost my brother to suicide. He was a paramedic for Ambulance Victoria. He took his life during the lead up to what many have referred to as the 'Ambulance Crisis'. I know now from very real first hand experience what effect a negative and bitter culture can have on emergency workers who are already under enormous stress from the exposures and dangers they face fulfilling their roles in the community.

I have also seen a number of friends from within the MFB lose their lives in the same way. Their decisions to take their lives should not be blamed solely on the organisations they work for. However, I cannot overstate the importance of having a stable, harmonious and supportive work environment for those of us who are consistently faced with incredibly stressful and dangerous situations.

It is my hope that the reforms will finally put and end to the fighting, to the attacks and to the uncertainty that have made the recent years so very difficult for me and for the crews I am responsible for. It is my hope that we can find a resolution that satisfies the public, governments and firefighters both volunteer and professional. I do not want to see any more bridges burnt between emergency services. If there is any way that politics can be put aside and the concerns of the volunteers to be addressed, while still allowing these reforms to proceed, I plead with this committee to find that course of action. I strongly believe that the safety of our great communities and it's emergency services workers depends on this issue being resolved soon.

Thank you for allowing my submission.

Regards,
Ben King