

7th July, 2017

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Assistant Clerk Committees
Department of the Legislative Council
Fire Services Bill Select Committee
Parliament House
Spring Street
East Melbourne, VIC, 3002

To the Fire Services Bill Select Committee,

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

My name is Mark Collier. I am a Career Firefighter with Country Fire Authority (CFA). I have been employed in this role for three years, however I started with CFA in 2005 as a junior volunteer. I remained a member of a volunteer brigade up until early this year, and my volunteer experiences include being a member of a volunteer only brigade, a member of an integrated brigade, and a member of a headquarters brigade, where the focus is on managing an Incident Control Centre (ICC). I hold a Bachelor of Emergency Management, and have experience as a Communications Officer with Emergency Services Telecommunications Authority (ESTA).

I write to formally advise my in-principle support for fire services reform in Victoria.

I am aware of the variety of arguments for and against these reforms. I don't intend recapitulating these points, as it is evident to me that they are well known and documented. What I would like to do, is share an experience that I feel summarises the need for fire services reform in Victoria.

I could give many stories that I believe add weight to the argument for an overhaul of the current system. I think it is clear that the current arrangements are deficient on a number of levels, and I hope that this example paints one element of what I expect will become a complete picture for the Committee. Please contact me if you would like specific details of this event. In mid-2016, I was a part of a career firefighting crew that was dispatched to an Emergency Medical Response (EMR) event. The incident was a three-minute drive from my work location, and involved a patient in their sixties who had suffered sudden cardiac arrest. On arrival, the patient was unconscious, and not breathing. Crews moved the patient to a workable location, commenced chest compressions, airway management, and applied a defibrillator. We delivered one shock to the patient. According to CFA's incident records, the first Ambulance Victoria (AV) crew was on scene four minutes after our arrival. CFA crews assisted AV for over an hour, during which time the patient experienced ROSC (Return of Spontaneous Circulation), and was transported to hospital. Our timely intervention assisted in ensuring that a patient who was clinically dead in a suburban home, was transported to hospital with the best chance of survival. This incident was very close to our station. However, consider this: had the patient been over the back fence, we would never have been responded. The house behind the patient's address is not considered within the primary response area of my work location, and therefore we would never have known about the call, let alone played the vital role we did in potentially saving a person's life. Fortunately, my work location is now a part of a very important 'trial' of 10-minute radial response for EMR. This trial, however, is only small scale, and the problem of obstructive assignment areas is both chronic and pervasive within CFA. Right now, there are brigades, both integrated and volunteer, not responding to calls where they could be actively serving the community, thanks to these assignment areas and the method in which CFA's operational response is currently dictated.

The hard facts are that the current system is costing people's lives. The proposed reforms, although lacking precision, open the gateway for positive changes that will benefit the broader Victorian community, the fire services, and its members. Priority three of the proposed reforms would address

the issue cited in the above example. Additionally, many other problems that I could highlight can be resolved in a clear and appropriate manner under the proposed Bill.

Victoria's fire services need reformation. Their structure has been the subject of debate over many decades. Recently, they were closely examined in the 2009 Victoria Bushfires Royal Commission¹. Whilst I acknowledge that the Commission did not recommend significant structural change, it "determined that an alternative structure for Victoria's fire agencies is required" (p. 373). The establishment of Emergency Management Victoria (EMV) has been a significant advancement in Victoria's emergency management arrangements. There has, however, been slower improvement within fire services at a grass roots level. This is directly impacting service delivery. I share the Commission's concerns that amalgamation has the potential to be problematic, as evidenced in the Tasmanian experience. However, I agree that with "commitment, planning, resources and change management over time" (p. 375) amalgamation can be successful, and this is certainly achievable in Victoria. I support their contention that "reform should be implemented within a framework that does not undermine the strengths of fire agencies" (p. 377), hence there should be a predominant focus on ensuring the development of better and stronger fire services, rather than just an ad hoc 'merge and forget' approach.

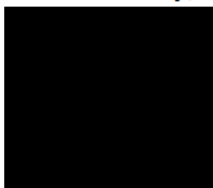
As evidenced currently, and confirmed ad nauseam in past reviews, change is overdue. This Bill gives us, as Victorians, the best chance to modify and strengthen our State's capacity to prevent, prepare for, respond to, and recover from fire and other emergencies.

In conclusion, I would like to leave the Committee with a quote from a paper titled 'Policy development and design for fire and emergency management'². I recommend that the Committee review this paper as a part of their considerations. It concludes:

Given factors such as population increase, wealth, trends in settlement patterns and climate change, it is inevitable that the future will bring more emergencies and disasters, and it seems similarly inevitable that the severity of these will increase. The fire and emergency management field faces escalating challenges and expectations. The rewards for successful policy may seem nebulous compared with those from high profile operational action, but events of the last few years in Australia and overseas highlight the need to develop more effective strategic policy processes that address the future rather than respond well to the past (p. 28).

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions, require any further information, or would like to discuss this, or other matters, further.

Yours sincerely,



Mark Collier

¹ 2009 Victoria Bushfires Royal Commission. (2010). Final report: Volume II: Fire Preparation, Response and Recovery. Victoria: Government Printer for the State of Victoria

² Handmer, J., & Dovers, S. (2008). Policy development and design for fire and emergency management. *Australian Journal of Emergency Management*, 23(1), 21-29