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Subject: Submission to the Fire Services Bill Select Committee in support of the fire service reform legislation
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Attachments: [image001.png](#)
[image002.png](#)
[image003.png](#)

Submission to the Fire Services Bill Select Committee in support of the fire service reform legislation

As a Professional Firefighter of the CFA, holding the rank of a Senior Station Officer, I have a task of ensuring the community and firefighters safety is our first priority when attending emergency incidents.

This task has become more problematic as I encounter response failures amongst the volunteer brigades I respond with. The CFA was established where community members protected their community. The members lived and worked in that community. That is not so much the case these days, whilst the member may live there they don't work there and that sees a reduction in their availability. Couple that with the pressures of securing a full time job where there's a reluctance 'to drop everything' and respond, along with the pressures of the modern family the community is not getting the fire truck out the door. Additionally, and just as important, their availability to train to attain and maintain the skills required to respond safely and effectively is reduced. We are in a space globally where the risks are for ever increasing and the need to acquire further and vaster skills to combat such is greater than it ever has been and will only continue to increase.

Having been a member of the CFA for 21 years, 5 of those as a Volunteer Firefighter, I have watched a proud fire brigade manage to deliver a service to the community through good will and potentially good luck. This approach is not safe, is not acceptable. The likelihood of fires is increasing, the consequence will always be the same - catastrophic. The reduction in volunteer availability along with the increasing population, fires developing faster and burning hotter due to the synthetic materials of our household contents and an increasing threat of both bushfires and terrorism are just a few reasons why we need a reform on how we did things yesteryear, 1958.

I have been a Firefighter in Springvale for 10 years and during that time there has been an enormous decline in the volunteer response of the Noble Park and Keysborough fire brigades.

Recently I was an Officer in charge of a major fire in the Springvale Fire District during November 2016. It involved a male setting himself and several other persons on fire within a commercial premise. 27 people were then trapped in thick acrid smoke surrounded by fire and with their only exit blocked. I increased the number of trucks responding, upon receipt of the call, and that involved a response of an additional truck crewed by volunteers. That truck failed to respond, a situation that has become all too common. So common that each time I now expect a volunteer truck to fail, or respond without the skills needed to do the job safely, and factor that in to my response plan. Without prejudice the current fire service structure is not safe and does not provide the level of protection needed for our modern society.

The Victorian Fire Services have changed in the past following a reaction to devastating fires where they have been criticised, undergoing procedural and legislative reform. We have a chance this time to be proactive rather than reactive through adopting the proposed legislation and associated reforms. The fire services inevitably will be reformed, the needs of the community dictate so, and I just hope we seize this opportunity before us and not wait for a catastrophe, for the sake of community and firefighter safety.

Regards,



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