

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees

INQUIRY INTO THE FIREFIGHTERS' PRESUMPTIVE RIGHTS COMPENSATION AND FIRE SERVICES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (REFORM) BILL 2017

My name is Jonathan Gawthrop, I have been a professional CFA firefighter for 3 years and I am currently based at Bendigo Fire Station holding the rank of Qualified Firefighter with specialist qualifications in Steep/High Angle Rope Rescue, EMR and an operator of our 37 meter ladder platform.

I write to express my support for the proposed fire services reform.

I have lived in Bendigo for over 15 years, and during this time I have seen this town grow into a major regional city, with infrastructure such as the new Bendigo hospital, the Bendigo bank and various other business/shopping centres (ie: the Bendigo marketplace) being constructed with many other new projects and growth forecast for the near future.

As a professional firefighter in Bendigo, I have seen first hand how this growth has impacted on not only our role as career firefighters but also our volunteer counterparts, whether it be by the continual increase in the number of callouts or the increasing life and property risk. There have been a number of callouts that we have attended where we have required the support of our local volunteers but they have been significantly delayed due to factors such as their work and traffic (which is increasing heavily). This is of no fault of their own, but it highlights one of the effects a dense population can have on volunteer brigades.

For areas around Victoria like Bendigo, we need to modernise our fire service to ensure we always remain on the front foot in order to keep our community safe.

- Victoria's fire services boundaries have not changed significantly in 60 years. Under this outdated system, 35 areas are wrongly zoned as 'country', despite being heavily urbanised and residential. Frankston, Bendigo, Ballarat, Dandenong, Wangaratta, Wodonga, Melton, Shepparton, Mildura and Geelong are just some of the 35 'country areas'.
- These areas need to be modernised as they are highly urbanised areas as part of the reform of the fire service. A rapid 8 minute response, with 7 professional career firefighters on two fire trucks is the minimum standard needed in highly urbanised areas.
- All Victorian, professional and volunteer firefighters, deserve modern fire services that will enable them to meet the needs of our growing communities.

To ensure the safety of all Victorians - including me as a firefighter, I ask that you to please seriously consider your support for the proposed fire services reform.

Reform of our fire services will ensure the safety of your constituents, and all communities in our growing state. Additionally, it will ensure the safety of our firefighters and stop the

ever increasing and unrealistic demand being placed on volunteer firefighters because of the enormous urban growth resulting in increased emergency calls.

I also respectfully submit that you give consideration to my request to modernise the fire service along with the introduction of presumptive legislation laws to protect fire service employees. Both are needed to be endorsed and implemented by Parliament before the commencement of the fire season. This is of most importance to me and my colleagues.

I hope you can understand that the majority of firefighters, both volunteer and career want to move forward with this reform, the damage that has been caused due to being dragged through the political sphere and by being demonised by the media has been heartbreaking. I hope that you can understand this and see the benefit of moving forward with a fresh start.

Should you wish to, I would welcome the opportunity to talk about my personal experiences as a professional firefighter further and why this reform is so important.

Kind regards

Jonathan Gawthrop

Qualified Firefighter, Bendigo Fire Station CFA.