

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees,

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

My name is (withheld); I live in (withheld) and work as a Qualified Firefighter for the Metropolitan Fire Brigade, with whom I have worked for several years.

Regarding the proposed reform of the fire services, I am in full support for the following reasons:

1. No respectable volunteer firefighter will quit the CFA as a result of this proposal, hence volunteer turnout and surge capacity won't be affected. I have discussed this proposal with numerous members of my family and friends who have been/are volunteer firefighters in small rural towns in northern Victoria, and they cannot see how it will negatively impact them responding to emergencies. They don't turnout with paid staff and they couldn't care less about what happens to paid staff, all they care about is dealing with the emergency in their town and then returning to their jobs or their homes. They realise that emergencies will still occur in their communities, they will still feel the same moral obligation to help their community in times of need, and they will continue to do so whether this proposed reform goes through or not.
2. It will be safer for paid firefighters.
 - a. One of the key issues that has been misreported ad nauseum by the media and some members of the Liberal Party relates to the need for a minimum of seven paid firefighters on the fireground when responding within their turnout areas. It is widely accepted internationally that a certain number of firefighters need to attend a fire to perform operations safely (in some brigades as many as eleven!) – particularly involving structure fires. To date, the safety of paid firefighters at integrated stations has been blatantly ignored by refusing to increase the minimum number of firefighters that respond, this reform will ensure that seven paid firefighters will turnout to every fire. Currently, they are undermanned and rely on good fortune that no accidents happen, and if it does, hope that assistance from volunteers is on the way in a timely manner. However, as great as the volunteers can be (and I wholeheartedly respect their efforts), they can't always be relied upon to respond due to any number of work/family/personal reasons. Further, if they do respond, unless they live next door to their station they can't turnout as quickly as paid staff. Finally, if an appliance does arrive with volunteers, there is no guarantee that they possess the same training to be useful in that situation – this is especially true for structural firefighting, where they need to undergo additional training to be able to wear breathing apparatus, not have too much facial hair to be able to wear it, and have that equipment on their truck. Paid firefighters at integrated stations deserve better than to hope for assistance; this proposed reform will give it to them.
 - b. Equipment and procedures can be standardised by merging the services, meaning firefighters from across the state can work together with greater safety and ease. As someone who has worked at stations on the fringe of the MFB border, I have turned out with CFA crews numerous times. As such, I am acutely aware of some of the differences between their equipment and ours. A prime example is that of hose couplings, which require an adaptor to join ours to theirs. It may seem like a simple thing but in an emergency every second counts, and by standardising equipment and procedures it will make our emergency response that much better and safer.

3. As a result of point 2, the community will have greater protection. The towns and suburbs that many of the integrated fire stations serve are now highly urbanised, meaning there are more units, and houses are now much closer together. If a dwelling in a highly urbanised area catches fire, the chance of the fire spreading to neighbouring dwellings is extremely high unless adequate resources promptly arrive on scene. As mentioned above, volunteers can't be relied upon to turnout or possess the requisite training due to a multitude of reasons. By having more paid firefighters in these areas, more resources will arrive on scene quicker, thereby reducing the likelihood of the fire spreading and increasing the safety of neighbouring properties.
4. Passing this proposed reform will end years of industrial dispute, and may mean that I can actually tell people my occupation without fear of being criticised. This dispute has been going on for longer than I have been a firefighter – I don't know any other reality within the MFB. It's tiring to continually see my workplace splashed across the front pages of 'newspapers', given an inordinate amount of airtime on radio, and viewed on various TV programs, all geared towards besmirching my character as a firefighter. I thought I would be proud of my new occupation when I joined the MFB, instead there have been several times where I have lied about what I do simply to avoid any hassle. Almost all of my friends, family and I live in CFA districts, and it's uncomfortable and hurtful meeting new people and being asked what my occupation is, only to hear a reply along the lines of "you're destroying the volunteer brigade" or "are you one of those union thugs" – yet when asked why they hold those opinions, the person rarely has any idea other than what has been portrayed in the media, which is generally inaccurate.

Thank you for taking the time to read and consider my submission in favour of this proposed reform. I look forward to seeing your recommendation to Parliament in due course.

Please note that I asked for my submission to be kept confidential, however this was declined. As a result, I have subsequently modified my submission because I am concerned about possible repercussions.

Yours sincerely,

(withheld)