



Dear Honourable Minister Dawson MLC,

We are writing on behalf of the dedicated volunteers of the:

1. Volunteer Fire and Rescue Service Association of Western Australia (VFRSAWA),
2. Volunteer Marine Rescue of Western Australia (VMRWA),
3. Volunteer Fire and Emergency Services Association of Western Australia (ESVA),
4. Association of Volunteer Bush Fire Brigades Western Australia (AVBFB) and
5. SES Volunteer's Association of Western Australia (SEVA).

We represent well over 26000 of Western Australia's selfless individuals who willingly devote their time and effort to respond to emergencies across our state.

We express our profound disappointment and concern over the recent decision made by the Labor government, in collaboration with the Greens, to vote 19/10 against the amendment proposed by the Opposition to extend presumptive PTSD protections to our dedicated emergency service volunteers. The same volunteers who tirelessly serve our communities day in and day out and save the state more than 2 billion dollars per year.

While we acknowledge and appreciate the recent extension of these protections granted to paid ambulance officers and career firefighters, we are disheartened by the exclusion of volunteers from this vital safeguard. Volunteers form an integral part of the emergency response infrastructure in Western Australia, particularly in regional Western Australia and their dedication cannot be overstated.

Volunteers respond to an astonishing 93% of emergency calls in Western Australia. Their selflessness and commitment to the safety and well-being of our fellow citizens should be recognised and supported at all levels of government. By denying them the same protections afforded to their paid counterparts, this injustice, is one that affects not only our volunteers but, their families and the communities they serve.

It is our understanding that the main basis for reaching this decision is that the services offered by DFES are sufficient, and assessed demand for these services suggests that they are sufficient. In response we would argue:

1. If this is the case, why was it deemed necessary for career firefighters and paid ambulance officers, who attend the same incidents as our volunteers, to receive the cover offered by the proposed PTSD amendment?
2. Whilst the Wellness Branch of DFES does a great job, they argue that they are insufficiently resourced to adequately provide the support they see as necessary. As a result, we believe there are under reported incidents of PTSD within the volunteer network, particularly in more regional and remote areas where provision of these support services is more challenging.

3. Not all bushfire brigades are covered by DFES, what consultation has been undertaken in this regard with the brigades, given DFES don't represent all of them?

Our organisations emphasise ongoing concerns we have regarding this decision and its potential ramifications. We whole heartedly request that you take into consideration the significant impact this has on the mental and emotional well-being of our volunteers.

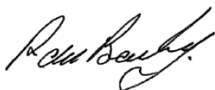
The toll that responding to emergencies can take on volunteer mental health is immense, and it is our duty as a society to ensure they are adequately supported and protected through the safety net of the proposed presumptive legislation. We view such decisions as a deterrent to future recruitment of volunteers, particularly in regional areas where the pool is small, as potential volunteers may feel that they are not adequately protected to the acceptable standards of our modern society.

The core values of the Labor party as printed in WA Labor Platform 2022 (p. 2) state the Labor party is founded on pillars of fairness, justice, and compassion for all. We formally request the WA Labor Government to reconsider its position on this matter and work toward extending these crucial protections to our emergency service volunteers. We believe that by doing so, we can collectively demonstrate our commitment to recognising and valuing their invaluable contributions to the safety and resilience of our communities which would then align with the fundamental pillars the Labor party is founded upon.

As volunteers we know and have experienced the power of volunteering in emergency services and the way being involved, with a core purpose of service to community, enriches our lives. Volunteering in emergency services also adds to the resilience of our Western Australian community. We want it to stay this way. Providing the presumptive legislation ensures our volunteers are covered when impacted by their service and is something we as their Associations are passionate about. This is also a volunteer retention strategy element to ensure our emergency services remain loyal and protected in undertaking its community services.

We look forward to a positive response and the opportunity to engage in a constructive dialogue on how we can better support our dedicated past, present and future volunteers.

Sincerely



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VFRSAWA



Trevor Wise
President
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Jeff Howe *ESM*

Jeff Howe
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