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Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2015

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Finance and
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To Finance and Administration Committee <FAC@parliament.qld.gov.au>;

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This week I attended the funeral of a firefighter in Brisbane who died of cancer. He was an active member of the community, a man who proudly wore a firefighters uniform and worked tirelessly to save lives and properties, educate and promote community resilience and bushfire safety. He was a father, a husband, a mate and a Rural Firefighter – a volunteer.

It is not fair, some would say discriminatory, that as a volunteer firefighter, this presumptive legislation proposes that he would have had less rights to compensation (had he made a claim) and would have to be exposed to many more, harsh conditions in his role as a firefighter to gain equal rights to those who are fulltime firefighters.

Presumptive legislation is not going to stop firefighters or anyone getting cancer. Minimising the risk of being exposed to situations that heighten the risks of getting cancer will help. A fair and equal legislation will help *all* firefighters if, God forbid, the time comes when they contract cancer or another major illness.

Under the presumptive legislation that has been introduced into Queensland Parliament under The Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation (Protecting Firefighters) Amendment Bill 2015, there are some obvious inequalities between the rights of Rural Firefighters as opposed to our Urban colleagues. We are all breathing in the same smoke, the carcinogens and diesel particulates – actually, I'd argue that Rural Firefighters with our little paper masks are probably breathing in more than those who have breathing apparatus.

Volunteer Firefighters are required to meet additional criteria under Section 36D (1)(c) which states " if the person was a volunteer firefighter for any period of the person's employment mentioned in paragraph (b)—has attended at least 150 exposure incidents." That's a pretty big ask within a five year period – I don't know of any Rural Firefighters who can produce evidence to represent these sorts of numbers.

Whilst our Commissioner continues to go to great lengths to recognise and show appreciation for the 36,000 Rural Firefighters across Queensland, proposed changes to legislation like this simply undermine her fine efforts.

Why should Rural Firefighters - who give so much of their personal time - be subject to different conditions than our urban colleagues?

Surely the focus should be on ensuring *all* firefighters in Queensland have access to appropriate Personal Protection Equipment so that they can perform their role safely and all go home to their families each evening.

This is quite simply about equality.

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