

# Submission

**To:** Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Standing Committee

**From:** Janet Reed

**Date:** 31 July 2011

1. I, Janet Lucille Reed, of , seek to make the following written submission to the Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Standing Committee with regard to The Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Amendment (Fair Protection for Firefighters) Bill 2011.
2. I am 47 years of age and I am the widow of the late Robert James Reed who was a career Senior Fire Fighter. I was 45 years of age when I had to bury my husband. I would like to tell you about my experiences as a Senior Fire Fighter's wife and as the mother of our children - Corey who is now 20 and Sarah who is nearly 18. Our children were 18 and 16 years of age when they lost their father.
3. My late husband, Senior Fire Fighter Robert Reed was a firefighter for 14 years, he was based at Success Fire Station when he was diagnosed with Kidney Cancer on 23 rd of December 2008. He died 10 months later on 29th of October 2009.
4. In Rob's everyday work where he looked after people in our communities as a fire fighter, performing road crash rescues, confined space rescues, dealing with hazardous material spills and other work he was regularly exposed to toxins and risk. He was a safe and conscientious worker and he wore protective clothing and used special safety equipment but it did not prevent him from being exposed to all sorts of toxins and some of that exposure was cumulative throughout his career.

5. I met Rob when we were 22 and we were married when we were 25. I fully supported his career as a fire fighter and even though there were times that I feared for his safety, especially with big fires, I never expected to bury him when he was 46 years of age as a result of his death from a disease that was caused by his work.
6. I am now his widow and at 47 years of age I am trying to support my children who are learning how to drive, have started their apprenticeships and are facing their 18th and 21st birthdays without their Dad - we somehow have to get on with our lives without him being here. Our house no longer feels like a home anymore without Rob. Sarah has had her school ball and has graduated from high school knowing that her Dad wanted to be there with her for those important milestones. I now watch Corey play football without Rob - his Dad was the team Runner and had always supported his sport and achievements.
7. The circumstances of Rob's treatment was extremely difficult emotionally and physically. Rob was diagnosed just before Christmas and he was scheduled for surgery to remove his kidney early in the New Year. After that surgery we were advised that they were confident that they had removed all of the cancer. After Rob's surgery he had to have further treatment for pain - he had stomach ulcers and we were advised that his ulcers were exacerbated by the worry and stress he had as a result of his cancer. Rob returned to light duties about 6 weeks after his surgery.
8. In July Rob had routine testing 6 months after his surgery and a CT Scan revealed that the Cancer had returned to his lymph nodes in his chest. Rob was hospitalised and had a biopsy which was complex procedure because his lung had to be collapsed to perform the biopsy, and the results confirmed that it was secondary cancer originating from the renal cell cancer. That diagnosis was dreadful and very stressful. Rob was then referred to an Oncologist and he commenced a course of chemotherapy treatment.
9. We thought that the treatment would work and Rob never gave up hope. Rob's health declined and the cancer spread to his brain. In September Rob had a course of radiotherapy treatment for 4 weeks to treat the cancer in his head and chest. I supported Rob through this terrible time and we were optimistic for a good outcome. Rob wanted to carry on as though it was "business as usual" to minimise the impact of his illness for everyone else

10. After he finished this treatment we were keen to get away as family to spend some quality time together and we went to Broome for a short break. And within two weeks of returning home Rob was hospitalised with swelling on his brain. He never regained consciousness, he died 3 days later on our 21st Wedding Anniversary.
11. Last year I organised my taxation return and even though we had private health insurance in the ten months of Rob's illness we paid an additional \$9,000 for his medical and ambulance bills. I hope that in the future no other fire fighter's families have to bear these sort of costs as well as bearing the emotional, mental and physical trauma associated with seeing their loved one suffer with these terrible work related diseases.
12. From the International studies into fire fighting, including the LeMasters study or Cincinnati study, it is obvious that fire fighting as an occupation is linked to a number of cancers - including the kidney cancer that Rob had - and [redacted] has also been diagnosed with kidney cancer. With the permission of [redacted] and [redacted] I make the following comments - [redacted] has received extensive treatment for his kidney cancer and has had one kidney removed and he has returned to the service. I understand the impact of his diagnosis and the impact of his treatment on [redacted] and [redacted].
13. I understand that the impact of this legislation will be to introduce a presumption that if a firefighter is diagnosed with a stated cancer, after having worked for a prescribed qualifying period, then the firefighter would be entitled to worker's compensation because the cancer would be treated like any other work-related illness unless the presumption could be over turned by evidence that proved some other factor caused the cancer.
14. I understand that the Bill amends legislation which covers firefighters in the ACT and Aviation firefighters.
15. I understand that this legislation may not apply to me or my children and that this legislation will not bring my husband back, but if Rob had had the benefit

of this sort of presumptive legislation the difference to our lives and some of the stresses that we faced during his treatment would have been reduced.

16. My personal message to you as legislators and elected politicians is that you have a chance to change law that will offer protection for fire fighters and their families. My family now face a life without Rob and some financial uncertainties - we grieve deeply for Rob and we know that he would face you himself if he was here today because he had strong beliefs about health and safety and protection for fire fighters while they protect all of us. Rob loved his job, but through his work he was exposed to toxins that eventually killed him and took him away from us. We'd do anything to bring him back - please look after his fire fighting colleagues and their families.

17. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require any further information -  
Janet Reed Ph: — —