**Social Development Committee Says It Needs To Be Vigorous In Its Oversight Role over the Department and Its Entities**

The Portfolio Committee on Social Development has committed itself to being vigorous in its role when it comes to keeping the Department of Social Development and its entities accountable. The committee today received a briefing from the Auditor-General on the audit outcomes of the department for the 2018/19 financial year and the grants money flow between the department, the South African Social Security Agency (Sassa), the South African Post Office (Sapo) and beneficiaries.

The Chairperson of the committee, Mr Mondli Gungubele, believes that the committee needs to wake up and be vigorous in doing its work. “What seems to be the case here, is that it is not only the department that is sleeping, even Parliament is sleeping. Because we are not doing our work in Parliament, the Auditor-General will end up doing a lot of things that in a normal democracy you were not meant to do. If we say we have the capacity to ask the department to wake up, that wake-up starts with us”, he said.

The committee believes that Parliament has a lot of work to do in ensuring that the department and its entities turn around and change their behaviour when it comes to how it handles the public purse. The committee was informed that the fruitless and wasteful expenditure increased from R2 million to R78 million. Sassa paid out R74 million for services that were not rendered, which shot up the amount to R78 million. The committee was also informed that R2 billion is the amount of irregular expenditure to date that needs to be condoned or written off by the department. From this amount, R1.8 billion is from Sassa.

Mr Gungubele says it is important to protect the Office of the Auditor-General and not expect it to do what is not in its mandate. “The weakness of our oversight is exposing our independent institutions. Because they end up doing things and they will continue to do some other things we are asking them to do, at the expense of their credibility and independence. The challenge we are faced with is that this committee has got to up the ante in terms of oversight. So that we do not make the Office of the Auditor-General do the work of the department,” he said.

The committee was also informed that the root causes for all these challenges include slow or no response to improving key controls, instability and unfilled vacancies in key positions, inadequate consequences for poor performance, transgressions and lack of consequence management. After receiving this presentation, the committee admitted that it is not only the department that has been “sleeping on duty” when it comes to holding its entities to account. The committee realised that it also needs to wake up and be vigorous in its oversight role over the department and its entities.

By Faith Ndenze

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