**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**BASIC EDUCATION PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE BRIEFED ON PRECAUTIONS REGARDING CORONAVIRUS**

**Parliament, Tuesday, 18 March 2020 –**The Portfolio Committee on Basic Education today received an update on the precautionary measures implemented by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) in response to the Covid-19 disease, caused by the coronavirus, which has led to the early closure of schools for the first term.

The committee heard that schools will close on 18 March 2020 and are expected to reopen on 14 April 2020. The school calendar will be amended to make up for the lost days of schooling. The June 2020 vacation will be shortened by seven days and the September one by two days. All school activities will be either scaled down, suspended or cancelled. This includes spelling bees, moot court, school athletics, school camps and assemblies. The committee further heard that the situation will be monitored daily and communication will only occur via one channel to avoid confusion.

The DBE informed the committee that during a meeting with provincial education departments yesterday, the department had urged them to take advantage of the time learners are at home to involved them in stimulating activities, such as homework, reading clubs and practicing mathematics. The DBE will provide the necessary guidelines to this effect before schools close this week. Committee Chairperson Ms Bongiwe Mbinqo-Gigaba said: “Educators must provide learners with tasks or assignments they are able to complete, even if it is work they would have done in the second term. This will make the catch-up programme easier on both learners and educators.”

The DBE re-emphasised the reasons for the closure, saying that schools are areas of high risk for spreading the virus.

President Cyril Ramaphosa announced a National State of Disaster on Sunday. One of the measures he announced included the early closure of schools and an extension of the holiday break until 14 April 2020, instead of 31 March, as originally planned before the coronavirus outbreak. The committee commended the DBE for its speedy response to the President’s announcement and called on all schools to provide learners with tasks or homework that will keep them busy during this period, and at the same time make up for some of the time lost.

The committee also received a presentation on the information communication technology roll-out in schools. The committee noted the progress, but express concern regarding the theft of such items from schools. The DBE suggested that such technology could be made education-specific, if all other functionalities were removed, which would reduce the desirability for criminals. The department also mentioned that some countries colour-code technological devices, so that it is obvious when it is a stolen product.

**ISSUED BY THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMUNICATION SERVICES ON BEHALF OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON BASIC EDUCATION, MS BONGIWE MBINQO-GIGABA.**