**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE CALLS FOR CABINET TO FAST-TRACK CHILDREN’S AMENDMENT BILL PROCESS TO ASSIST WITH COURT ORDER**

**Parliament, Thursday, 21 May 2020**– The Portfolio Committee on Social Development has made a call for Cabinet to fast-track its process to approve the Children’s Amendment Bill so that it can be tabled in Parliament. The finalisation of this Bill is critical as it ensures compliance to the North Gauteng High Court order deadline of the end of November 2020.

The committee today received a foster care progress report from the Department of Social Development on the implementation of the North Gauteng High Court order. Amongst the challenges facing the department is that some children’s courts did not extend section 159 foster care orders during the lockdown. The committee has requested the department to find a way of co-ordinating with the judiciary at the national level on ways in which this issue can be resolved.

The committee notes and appreciates the hiring of 1 809 additional social workers for a period of three months to work on Covid-19-related interventions so as to relieve social workers to focus on foster care cases and other social development services. The committee, however, believes there is a need in the long-term to hire more social workers on a permanent basis as the sector has a high shortage of social workers.

The committee has strongly raised the need for a coordinated and customised approach in relation to food distribution during this period of the Covid-19 pandemic. There have been a number of concerns regarding the uncoordinated way in which food parcels have been distributed, and collaboration between organisations and the Department of Social Development.  The committee has also emphasised the importance of adhering to the regulations stipulated by the Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs on food distribution to ensure that the dignity and safety of the recipients are prioritised. It therefore noted and welcomed the Minister’s explanation that the regulations do not ban the distribution of food but encourages it to be delivered at people’s homes so as to adhere to social distancing. It is in this spirit that the committee has resolved to meet with non-profit and faith-based organisations involved in food distribution in its next meeting to find ways of providing food effectively, in a united effort.

**ISSUED BY THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMUNICATION SERVICES ON BEHALF OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT, MR MONDLI GUNGUBELE.**