**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**COMMITTEE CALLS FOR FINALISATION OF THE INTEGRATED JUSTICE SYSTEM PROJECT**

**Parliament, Saturday, 23 May 2020** – The Department of Justice and Correctional Services, and the National Prosecutions Authority (NPA) yesterday presented their strategic and performance plans to the Portfolio Committee on Justice and Correctional Services.

The Chairperson of the committee, Mr Bulelani Magwanishe, said the engagements with both the department and the NPA were very fruitful, however, he said he has serious concerns about the number of unfilled vacancies in the department which stands at 22 percent, and asked the department to answer on unfilled vacancies that include senior management positions that are filled on acting basis.

“Twenty-two percent vacancy rate is unacceptable, hiring people is not difficult, as a committee we don’t think the leadership in the department is stable – we can’t have a department with so many vacant senior management positions, my little experience in government has taught me that once you have unfilled posts at senior management levels it means targets will not be met,” said Mr Magwanishe.

Mr Magwanishe also called on the department to finalise the Integrated Justice System project, which he said is taking too long.

“By the end of this term in 2024 we want to have the integrated justice system, we need finality, we cannot have a project that takes over a decade before it is finalised, please ensure that the matter is concluded,” he added.

Furthermore, Mr Magwanishe told the department that the committee expects it and all its entities to achieve clean audits by the year 2024, and he encouraged them to learn from the Legal Aid which he said has been getting it right for the last sixteen-years.

The committee also noted reports from the NPA and identified a need for policy uniformity on the issue of language interpreters within the justice cluster as currently the courts and police apply different policies especially on foreign language interpreters.

Mr Magwanishe called on the National Director of Public Prosecutions (NDPP), Adv Shamila Batohi, to expedite the investigation into the allegations of racism in the NPA, and informed her that the committee receives letters of complaints almost every day.

The committee plans to have further engagement with the Solicitor General about the briefing patterns and the late payment of lawyers. Members of the committee raised concerns over allegations of corruption and claims of bribery against prosecutors saying that the allegations threaten the independence and impartiality of the justice system.

**ISSUED BY THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMUNICATION SERVICES ON BEHALF OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE AND CORRECTIONAL SERVICES, MR BULELANI MAGWANISHE**