**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**COMMITTEE ON COGTA CALLS ON FREE STATE TO IMPROVE RECOVERY RATE FOR COVID-19**

**Parliament, Wednesday, 26 August 2020**– The Portfolio Committee on Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs received briefings yesterday from the Free State Provincial Government on its Covid-19 response plans, and progress on intervention in the municipalities under administration.

The Free State government’s MEC for Social Development, Ms Mamiki Qabathe, who led the delegation that included the MECs for Education, and Cooperative Governance and Human Settlements briefed the committee on the province’s Covid-19 response plans.

The committee told the delegation that the province can do better to improve the recovery rate of 60 percent of Covid-19 cases in the province, which the committee said is low compared to the national one, which stands at 82 percent currently.

Furthermore, the committee said there is a low use of quarantine sites across the province. It said 101 of the 105 beds in Fezile Dabi are empty and only 108 of Lejweleputswa Districts’ 195 beds are used, yet the district has the highest number of Covid-19-related deaths due to the mining activities in the area. The committee noted that quarantine sites in Thabo Mofutsanyana and Mangaung districts are slightly busier.

 The committee asked the delegation whether it met the National Treasury’s requirements on the procurement of goods and services under instruction eight, which includes reporting any procurement of goods and services within 30 days to the National Treasury.

The reports must include the details of the companies that won tenders for Covid-19-related businesses.

The Chairperson of the committee, Ms Faith Muthambi, asked the MEC for Health about the existence of the provincial disaster management plan according to section 38 of the Disaster Management Act. She asked if the Provincial Department of Cooperative Governance would develop a robust provincial multi-hazards disaster management plan for the entire province to deal proactively with future disasters like the Covid-19 one.

She also asked the delegation about other departments that have been identified to start developing plans and building disaster management capacity and the time frames for that, and about which municipalities included Covid-19 resilience building in their Integrated Development Plans and provided a budget for that.

On progress on the intervention in the four municipalities, the committee was briefed on the background of the intervention in each municipality. The municipalities are: Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality, Maluti-A-Phofung Local Municipality, Mafube Local Municipality and Metsi Maholo Local Municipality.

According to the delegation, their problems include crumbling infrastructure, political and administrative instability, financial mismanagement and corruption, among other things. The committee heard that there is notable progress in all the municipalities.

 Intervention in Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality was initiated on 19 Dec 2019. Ms Muthambi asked the delegation if the National Council of Provinces (NCOP) was duly informed within the seven-day period stipulated by law. She also asked, if this was the case, what was the NCOP’s response and the impact of its response, if any.

As the administrators took office in the municipality on 27 Jan 2020, Ms Muthambi asked if the terms of reference approved by the provincial executive on 16 March 2020 and submitted to the municipality on 13 May 2020.

Also, Ms Muthambi asked what authority the administrators have in the absence of approved terms of reference. As the Mangaung intervention is a financial intervention, which requires a financial recovery plan to be implemented by the administrators, what was executed by the administrators from 27 Jan 2020 to July 2020 in the absence of an approved financial recovery plan?

Ms Muthambi said, over the past two years Mangaung has consistently been owed in excess of R600 million by the Free State Provincial Government. At the end of July 2020, the total outstanding amount was R630 million and schools’ debt is R121.5 million. Ms Muthambi asked the delegation if the provincial government is contributing to the financial problem of the Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality.

Ms Qabathe who was also acting as the Premier, assured the committee that all the questions which the delegation didn’t answer will be answered in writing and will be sent to the committee. In admitting the mistakes made by the provincial government in the manner in which it intervened in the municipalities, she thanked Ms Muthambi for highlighting some of those mistakes and providing a way forward.

**ISSUED BY THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMUNICATION SERVICES ON BEHALF OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON COOPERATIVE GOVERNANCE AND TRADITIONAL AFFAIRS, MS FAITH MUTHAMBI.**