**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**HEALTH COMMITTEE BRIEFED BY EFF ON NATIONAL HEALTH AMENDMENT BILL**

**Parliament, Wednesday, 7 October 2020 –**The Portfolio Committee on Health was briefed by the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) on the National Health Amendment Bill (a private member’s Bill) for deliberation by the committee.

Briefing the committee, EFF member Dr Susan Thembekwayo said the Bill seeks to amend the National Health Act (Act No. 61 of 2003) in order to provide for clinics in the public sector to operate and provide health services 24-hours a day and seven days a week. She informed the committee that, in its current form, Section 4(3) of the National Health Act makes provisions for the kind of healthcare services clinics and community health centres must provide. However, it does not stipulate operating hours.

The problem currently, according to Dr Thembekwayo, is that clinics normally operate between 07h00 and 16h00, Monday to Friday. These limited operating hours severely constrain access to critical primary healthcare and infringe on the rights of citizens to have access to healthcare as and when needed.

Members of the committee welcomed the presentation and said expanding access to healthcare at primary level is something the country should strive for. However, given the current economic situation, the committee questioned where the budget would come from to enable clinics to operate 24/7. The committee asked if a costing exercise has been conducted on the proposed legislation and the sources of funding. In addition, staff shortages will need to be considered.

Committee Chairperson Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo said the committee will also seek input from the Department of Health on the proposed legislation “This presentation will need another day to look into the issues that have been expressed in the meeting”, he said.

Dr Dhlomo informed the committee that he received a letter from the Speaker of the National Assembly accompanied by a memorandum from the National Education, Health and Allied Workers' Union (Nehawu). In the letter, the Speaker asks the committee to respond and process Nehawu’s memorandum. The memorandum highlights various issues brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic, such as shortage of staff, corruption and the plight of community healthcare workers.

Dr Dhlomo informed the committee that he has forwarded the letter to the Department of Health to hear what it has done to process Nehawu’s memorandum. The committee will be able to engage with Nehawu after it receives responses from the department.

**ISSUED BY THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMUNICATION SERVICES ON BEHALF OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, DR SIBONGISENI DHLOMO**