**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**JUSTICE AND CORRECTIONAL SERVICES COMMITTEE ‘CAUTIOUSLY HAPPY’ ABOUT PROGRESS MADE BY PUBLIC PROTECTOR**

**Parliament, Thursday, 8 October 2020 –** The Portfolio Committee on Justice and Correctional Services today indicated that it is “cautiously happy” about the progress reported on by the Office of the Public Protector of South Africa (PPSA) for meeting, and in some cases, exceeding its targets for the 2019/20 financial year. This includes the investigation and prompt finalisation of reports.

Committee Chairperson, Mr Bulelani Magwanishe, said the committee will reserve its final judgement until the Auditor-General verifies the performance reported on today. “This is extremely encouraging. It shows the organisation is moving speedily forward, towards good health. However, we expect a 100% reaching of targets from Chapter 9 institutions and not 79% as in your case. The progress you have, however, made cannot go unnoticed.”

The committee heard that the PPSA investigated 1 602 Covid-19-related complaints received since the beginning of the lockdown. The bulk of these matters relate to the R350-a-month special social relief of distress grant, while the rest have to do with personal protective equipment procurement irregularities which have financial implications of an estimated R4 billion for the public purse.

The committee further heard that the PPSA also embarked on its own initiative investigation into the state of the country’s healthcare system and basic education. The investigation was prompted by a public outcry and media reports as a result of the pandemic. The organisation visited hospitals and schools in various provinces to establish, among other things, how they are coping with the devastation brought about by Covid-19 and the general state of the facilities in respect of whether they are able to render services effectively and efficiently to the public of the Republic.

In terms of funding cuts, the committee heard that budget cuts expected by the organisation amount to R209.4 million between 2020/21 and 2023/24. The budget cut for 2020/21 has been confirmed, however, budget cuts from 2021/22 onwards are still to be confirmed by the National Treasury.

It further emerged that the office needs more than R52 million over the Medium Term Expenditure Framework to fill positions which became vacant since the 2017-18 financial year. The PPSA’s original cost of employment (CoE) budget amounted to R266 million, R280.6 million and R294.8 million in 2020/21, 2021/22 and 2022/23 respectively. The National Treasury proposed budget reductions on CoE that amount to R160.6 million between 2020/21 and 2022/23. No provision for cost of living adjustments, except for medical aid increases, housing allowances and notch progressions. The committee heard that if budget reductions are implemented, the PPSA will significantly overspend on CoE.

Mr Magwanishe also raised the committee’s concerns regarding the proposed budget cuts facing the office of the PPSA. “We have taken a principled decision in this committee that we do not support budget cuts, especially for Chapter 9 institutions. It is worrying that you have to close offices, which means these cuts are crippling your office,” he said.

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