**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**COMMITTEE HEARS THAT THE NATIONAL HEALTH AMENDMENT BILL WILL HAVE MASSIVE FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

**Parliament, Wednesday, 21 October 2020 –**The Portfolio Committee on Health was briefed by the Department of Health on its input on the National Health Amendment Bill (a private member’s Bill) as presented by the sponsor of the Bill, Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) MP, Dr Suzan Thembekwayo.

The proposed 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. Briefing the committee on the 7th of October 2020, Dr Thembekwayo 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.

Responding to the proposed Bill, the department said it is necessary to secure funding for the implementation of legislation. The funding of the Bill is very much important; the government budget cycle determines the strategic objectives and the annual performance plan to achieve the goal of government. The Bill in the current form will have massive financial implications for the department and the ministry. The quantification of costs must be done before the Bill is considered.

Dr Thembekwayo had indicated that the department and the ministry must find money to implement the provisions of this Bill. The department, in its response, said the country is currently under financial stress and would struggle to adjust the current budget against the health requirements because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Differing views emerged from committee members in response to the input of the department on the Bill. Some committee members were of the view that the reasons provided by the department as to why the Bill should not be legislated are disappointing, and that the response of the department is quite critical on the provision of primary healthcare services in the country.

Other committee members said the proposed legislation is welcomed. However, the current financial situation would make it difficult and impossible for it to be implemented, considering the financial implications it would have on the fiscus.

Committee Chairperson, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo, said the department needs to look into improving healthcare facilities (clinics) so that they deliver services on a 24-hour basis. “What we see happening is slow progress. However, much slower in certain areas, particularly in provinces such as the Eastern Cape and Northern Cape.”

The committee resolved to schedule another meeting in two weeks’ time where a report will be presented with the input of Parliament’s legal team.

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