**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**HEALTH COMMITTEE RECEIVES UPDATE ON FREE STATE COVID-19 PLANS**

**Parliament, Wednesday, 3 March 2021** – The Portfolio Committee on Health today met with the Free State Provincial Department of Health for an update on the province’s plans to respond to the Covid-19 virus, including the roll-out of the vaccination programme.

As part of its oversight and to ensure effective provision of quality healthcare and application of policy, the committee invited all provincial health departments to present their Covid plans. Free State was the last of the provinces to brief the committee.

The committee welcomed the province’s plans to vaccinate all healthcare workers as the first line of defence against the virus. The committee also advised the province to make sure that all those participating in the vaccination were made aware of the fact that they were participating in a trial process to test the effectiveness of the Johnson & Johnson Covid-19 vaccine. Johnson & Johnson had a clinical trial in South Africa where its safety and efficacy were established.

The committee also welcomed the reports that the Free State was deriving value from the deployment of Cuban doctors, after the province was allocated 17 doctors from the team that is assisting the country in the battle against coronavirus.

The committee also welcomed the report that some of the unresolved issues from previous engagements with the department have since been attended to, such as emergency medical services.

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