**SAPO AND SASSA PRESENT JOINT PLAN TO COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

The South African Post Office (Sapo) and the South African Social Security Agency (Sassa) presented their joint action plan to the Portfolio Committee on Social Development on Friday.

The joint action plan is intended to address challenges regarding grant payments at many pay points in the country.

The committee heard from Sapo that there has been an increase in robberies in post offices that resulted in delayed payments.

“The risk was exacerbated by the payment of the R350 social relief grant since last year in August. Our branches had to hold large amounts of cash throughout the month,” said Sapo representative.

The committee heard that Sapo was installing security systems that even if criminals get through, the money remained stained and they will be unable to use it. But also that 118 people and 22 staff members involved in the robberies have been arrested.

Committee Members sought clarity on various issues, including alternative ways that are there for people to access grants, lapse of social relief grants in April, and the money lost due to robberies at post offices.

Committee Member, Ms Arries, commented that nearly every month post offices are robbed, especially around the time when social grants are to be paid. “What plans are in place, you need to come up with other plans to stop robberies and ensure the safety of our people.”

She asked how much money had been lost as a result of robberies.

Minister Lindiwe Zulu said the systems the departments put in place were crucial and that needed to underpin the work of responding to the people.

She said Ministers needed to get the officials to dig deeper in trying to improve the service. “We need to look at a payment model that will deal decisively with the challenges and that business re-engineering should include fingertips information about payments at all pay points.”

The Chairperson, Mr Mondli Gungubele, said positive work was being done but could be undermined by the lack of details. Also, the committee had earlier resolved to reject all clauses referring to the early childhood development in the Children’s Amendment Bill following a legal advice that was presented. Public hearings will be rescheduled as dates for next week clashed with the sitting of the House.

**By Sibongile Maputi**

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