**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**JUSTICE AND CORRECTIONAL SERVICES COMMITTEE NOTES WITH CONCERN BUDGET CUTS TO ENTITIES**

**Parliament, Friday, 7 May 2021 –** The Portfolio Committee on Justice and Correctional Services last night engaged with the office of the Public Protector of South Africa (PPSA) regarding its Annual Performance Plan and Budget for 2021/2022.

The committee heard the office requires additional funding for 2021 and the Medium Term Expenditure Framework – R36.4 million for 2021/2022, R26.3 million for 2022/2023 and R27.7 for 2023/2024. This includes funding for critical positions, subject matter experts, e-library, security, procurement of an electronic document system and the upgrade of information communication technology (ICT).

The committee heard that during the 2017/18 and 2018/19 financial years, 33 positions became vacant due to resignations. Due to budget constraints, PPSA could not fill these positions. Regarding the need for subject matter experts, the committee was told that there is currently a significant demand for subject matter experts when executing complex investigations that require specialised skills. These include actuaries, procurement experts, forensic specialists, built (construction) environment specialists and ICT specialists.

The PPSA further requires a subscription for the online law library LexisNexis. In terms of security services, the PPSA does not have security services in 17 of its 18 offices across the country. Only its head office has security services. There have been several break-ins and robberies of staff when they work late. This poses a threat to PPSA staff members, its clients and assets. Security is therefore important and requires immediate funding.

The PPSA indicated the need for an electronic document management system to automate the creation, distribution and distraction of documents electronically, which in turn will increase its turnaround times on investigations. It further requires additional funding to upgrade of PPSA's ICT infrastructure. This is urgently needed, as the current server is very old and more downtime has been experienced recently, having a big impact on operations.

Committee Chairperson Mr Bulelani Magwanishe said lessons can be learnt by entities from the current realities of Covid-19 into the future. “This includes how to reduce the cost of doing business, like with ICT or how to reduce the cost of office space by sharing or using state-owned facilities.”

He commended the PPSA for its clean audit, joining Legal Aid South Africa (Lasa) and the Office of the Chief Justice, all three in the Department of Justice and Correctional Services’ stable. “This is clearly linked to improved performance from reaching 72% of targets to 79%. We commend the office and want to see it continue with this upward trajectory.”

The committee also received a briefing from Lasa, which said that the budget for 2021-2022 was prepared in accordance with a baseline reduction of R182 027 000, composed of R100 692 000 for compensation of employees and R81 335 000 for goods and services expenditure.

Mr Magwanishe said the committee noted the budget cuts to the department and all entities. “In this case, it has an effect on indigent people. You [LASA] might not have felt the budget cut now, but in the outer years you will feel its impact and so would those South Africans that need legal representation, but cannot afford to pay for it. The committee will do everything in its power to ensure vulnerable South Africans are not left unprotected and said entities must find innovative ways to amend funding gaps.”

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