**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**JUSTICE AND CORRECTIONAL SERVICES COMMITTEE BRIEFED ON SPECIAL COVID-19 PAROLE AND SEX BETWEEN INMATES AND OFFICIALS**

**Parliament, Wednesday, 12  May 2021 –** The Portfolio Committee on Justice and Correctional Services today engaged with the Department of Correctional Services (DCS) on progress regarding the release of offenders on parole to address Covid-19 and the capacity of community corrections to manage the additional numbers into their system.

The committee also received a briefing regarding alleged incidents of sexual conduct between inmates and officials and measures in place to address such incidents. The Chairperson of the Sub-Committee on Corrections, Mr Qubudile Dyantyi, who chaired the committee meeting today, said the DCS has a long way to go in responsding to its mandate. “You can excel at everything else but if you are struggling at your core mandate of rehabilitation, it does little to assist. You are never going to get restorative justice if you don’t attend to those issues.”

The committee heard that the DCS’s specific Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) are utilised together with other SOPs and Guidelines from the Department of Health (DoH), National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD), Centre for Disease Control (CDC) and the World Health Organisation (WHO). These SOPs provide guidance on mitigation strategies that must be implemented to prevent, detect and respond to Covid-19 in the DCS.

Regarding the offenders who were to benefit from the Special Parole Dispensation, the committee heard that they were to be placed out as from 20 May 2020 in controllable groups as per identified category and sentence group. It was projected that a total of approximately 19 000 offenders who committed non-violent crimes would benefit from the Special Parole Dispensation. Regions were provided with the list to verify and purify. This resulted into a purified total figure of 18 544. Other offenders that had been identified to qualify picked up further charges, hence the drop of qualifying cases to 17 922.

As at April 2021, a total of 126 inmates have been re-admitted. The 126 re-offenders/alleged re-offenders represent 0.9% of the 13 989 offenders that were released during the Special Parole Dispensation. The DCS said the 2020 Covid-19 Special Parole Dispensation was successfully implemented. However, more still needs to be done to get communities more involved in the monitoring, rehabilitation and reintegration of parolees and probationers to ensure a smooth reintegration process.

The committee heard that community correction creates a conducive environment for the reintegration of parolees and probationers through supervision, monitoring and rehabilitation and ensure that parolees and probationers comply with conditions of the parole. The DCS ensured that probationers and parolees complied with their set conditions despite an increase in the caseload of probationers and parolees.

Restorative justice processes are to be implemented with some restrictions, in line with Covid-19 regulations, to ensure the participation of victims and offenders. Parole boards must ensure victim participation prior to considering offenders for parole. Communities must be prepared for the release of parolees and probationers in order to ensure effective reintegration and reduce reoffending.

The DCS said fully capacitated community corrections will alleviate overcrowding in correctional centres. The idea of community corrections has become a core component of the South African criminal justice system as it provides a useful and less costly alternative to incarceration. Partnership with all relevant stakeholders is to be continued. Furthermore, the implementation of the approved Social Reintegration Framework will contribute towards promoting community corrections as a social responsibility.

Regarding incidents of sexual activities between officials and inmates, the committee heard that this seldom occurs in the DCS workplace but when it happens it is regarded as despicable and unfortunate. The DCS said these acts of misconduct defeat the mandate of the department and as a result, puts the name of the department into disrepute. In the latest incident, the official caught on camera during such action had been dismissed and the offender was downgraded to a maximum offender and transferred to a different facility.

The committee heard that the disciplinary code and procedure must be consistent with the principles of administrative justice, while at the same time ensuring effective and timeous action in instances where the safe, secure and orderly management of a correctional  institution is at stake. Therefore, officials of Correctional Services must be continuously exposed to training and awareness campaigns.

Mr Dyantyi asked in conclusion for a written response regarding the number of women in brown uniform. How many of them are in management positions and how many are foot soldiers who interact daily with inmates? What support do they get to execute their work, infrastructure support and  security support? “One is picking up a sense of vulnerability when it comes to their role and what they do,” he said.

**ISSUED BY THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMUNICATION SERVICES ON BEHALF OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE SUB-COMMITTEE ON CORRECTIONAL SERVICES, MR QUBUDILE DYANTYI.**