**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**BASIC EDUCATION COMMITTEE RECEIVES BRIEFING ON GBV PROGRAMMES AND INTERVENTIONS**

**Parliament, Tuesday, 17 August 2021 –**The Portfolio Committee on Basic Education today received a briefing from the Department of Basic Education (DBE) on the gender-responsive planning, monitoring, evaluation and auditing framework, as per the established task team and gender-based violence (GBV) programmes, as implemented in the 75 education districts.

Committee Chairperson Ms Bongiwe Mbinqo-Gigaba said the committee was further briefed on the girls’ and boys’ movement for prevention of violence; how the DBE is dealing with sexual harassment at schools; and GBV misconduct by educators/officials. The committee also received a presentation from the South African Council for Educators (SACE) on these matters.

“The presentations were very detailed and thorough. It not only gave the committee a clear picture of the current situation, but also of the plans and policies in place to address the pandemic of GBV, specifically in the education sector.”

The committee heard GBV is addressed through the provision of comprehensive sexuality education (CSE), which includes access to sexual and reproductive health services for secondary schools and also focuses on prevention of alcohol and drug use and learner pregnancy (now also Covid-19) as GBV risk factors. In primary schools, activities mainly focus on raising awareness of social justice and vulnerabilities, such as reporting abuse and support for GBV-affected learners. There are 80 CSE lessons (implying 80 hours) in the life skills and life orientation subjects. 29 (36%) of these lessons specifically address GBV.

The committee further heard that according to information from provincial education departments, 275 cases of sexual misconduct have been reported in provincial education departments (PEDs) in the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 financial years. Out of 275 cases, 166 have been finalised and 92 are still pending, 39 cases were referred to the Education Labour Relations Council (ELRC) in accordance with the collective agreement of 2018 since 2019/2020. The number of finalised cases includes cases that were withdrawn due to insufficient evidence, implicated educators resigned and parents refused to give permission for their children to testify. Information on cases of sexual violence against learners and teachers resides with the PEDs, as the employer, and therefore the DBE relies on the information provided by the PEDs.

In the first quarter of 2021/2022, SACE received 132 cases of sexual misconduct. The three provinces with highest rate of sexual misconduct cases reported against teachers are Free State (27 cases); Gauteng with 10 cases and KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) with nine.

Regarding GBV programmes and monitoring, the committee heard that the DBE annual performance plan (APP) for 2020-2021 had no indicator on GBV. Even so, the DBE has subsequently been monitoring the trends in education districts in six provinces: the Free State, Northern Cape, North-West, Limpopo, KZN and Gauteng. The total number of schools per district received copies of the Protocol for Management and Reporting of Sexual Abuse and Harassment. A number of schools per district have been implementing the Programme to End Schools-Related GBV and 20 out of 43 districts monitored the prevention of GBV (baseline). This accounts for 4 426 out of 10 925 schools across the six provinces.

SACE informed the committee that in the past five years the most common reported sexual offences between educators and learners are sexual harassment, abuse and assault; rape; and improper and sexual relationships. This includes sexual-related GBV, with the participants generally being male teachers-on-female learners, male teachers-on-female teachers, male teachers-on-male learners (prevalent in single-sex schools), female teachers-on-male learners (emerging trend – abuse of high school boys) and taking advantage of learners in special schools (deaf, blind, autism, physical disability).

Following guilty verdicts, SACE ensures that perpetrators’ names are struck off the register of educators, in line with the SACE Act and SACE policy of mandatory sanctions. The names are then submitted to the PEDs so that they can be blocked on the public servant verification system Persal.

Ms Mbinqo-Gigaba said: “The abuse of learners in particular remains a grave concern to us, even more so those with special needs who cannot always speak up for themselves. The committee will continue to closely monitor all programmes and initiatives on these critical matters.”

**ISSUED BY THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMUNICATION SERVICES ON BEHALF OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON BASIC EDUCATION, MS BONGIWE MBINQO-GIGABA.**