**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**COMMITTEES EXPRESS CONCERN OVER UNDER-EXPENDITURE ON GRANTS FOR DESERVING VULNERABLE CHILDREN**

 **Parliament, Thursday, 19 August 2021 –**The Select Committee on Appropriations, and the Select Committee on Education and Technology, Sports, Arts and Culture, as well as the provincial committees on education and finance, held a virtual two-day oversight meeting from yesterday which focused on in-year monitoring expenditure of the HIV/Aids (Life Skills Education) Grant and the Learners with Profound Intellectual Disabilities Grant for the 2020/21 financial year.

In giving a background to the meeting, the Chairperson of the Select Committee on Appropriations, Ms Dikeledi Mahlangu, highlighted legislation that outlines the oversight mandate of the committee on the executive. She said the two-day meeting was to assess the provision of services to the vulnerable groups of society such as learners. Furthermore, she said the committees thought an assessment of the implementation and expenditure on the two conditional grants was necessary.

She said they felt that the  exercise would have a greater impact if the committees  invited their provincial counterparts, the portfolio committees on education and finance, and the Select Committee on Appropriations’ key stakeholders, the Financial and Fiscal Commission, the Parliamentary Budget Office and the National Treasury.

The presentation that was made by the National Treasury painted a picture of under-spending by the provinces on both grants. Members of the committees heard that more than R10 million is going to be returned to the National Revenue Fund because of under-expenditure on HIV/Aids (Life Skills Education) Grant, and R20 million on Learners with Profound Intellectual Disabilities Grant.

The Chairperson of the Select Committee on Education and Technology, Sports, Arts and Culture, Mr Elleck  Nchabeleng, said it was very difficult to understand under-spending as the grant allocations were not imposed on provinces.

He said: “Underspending is ironical as it is the provinces that requested the allocations, the money was not imposed on provinces, they requested the amounts.” When asked about under-spending, the National Treasury attributed under-expenditure largely to historical structural problems and arguing that it can be resolved by addressing those problems..

Members of the committees expressed disappointment and concern over reported under-spending, failure to meet targets and lack of consequence management, among other things. The committees called for consequence management and the appointment of the right people in positions in order to ensure that funds that the government makes available for services to the people, especially to the vulnerable, are spent effectively and for that purpose.

The Co-Chairpersons also expressed serious concern over the fact that only three provinces had submitted their presentations a day before the start of the oversight meetings, although invitations for the meeting and for the submission of presentations was issued on time. Furthermore, the committees said non-attendance of some MECs  was an indication of taking Parliament for granted.

The Co-Chairpersons said the meeting was an informative exercise and a build-up for the budget process as it will also assist the committees in drafting concrete and specific recommendations during  the budget process.

Ms Mahlangu said the meeting is an important exercise for the Select Committee on Appropriations with the sector committees. “We will be looking at other sectors as well, conditional grants are showing some signs of under-expenditure and under-performance. The core function of this committee is to follow the money and indeed we will do that without fear or favour,” emphasised Ms Mahlangu.

**ISSUED BY THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMUNICATION SERVICES ON BEHALF OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS, MS DIKELEDI MAHLANGU, AND THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND TECHNOLGY, SPORTS, ARTS AND CULTURE, MR ELLECK NCHABELENG.**