**MEDIA STATEMENT

HEALTH COMMITTEE WAS BRIEFED ON PROPOSED REGULATIONS OF THE NATIONAL HEALTH ACT

Parliament, Thursday, 14 April 2022** – The regulations proposed in terms of the National Health Act received mixed feedback from the Members of the Portfolio Committee on Health.

The committee was briefed today by the Minister of Health, Dr Joe Phaahla and the Department of Health on the proposed regulations which follow the termination of the national state of disaster by President Cyril Ramaphosa earlier in April.

The health regulations have been published for public comment, giving people until 16 April to make comments. The period for public comment has been extended by the department to 24 April 2022.

The department informed the committee that it has to embark on the process of amending the health regulations in terms of the National Health Act of 2003 and the International Health Regulations Act of 1974 in order to address Covid-19 and other notifiable medical conditions outside the National State of Disaster.

The following are the set of regulations that are being amended: regulations relating to the surveillance and the control of notifiable medical conditions; regulations relating to public health measures in points of entry; regulations relating to the management of human remains; and regulations relating to environmental health.

The new regulations will be finalised and promulgated under the National Health Act once public comment had been taken into account.

The Chairperson of the committee, Dr Kenneth Jacobs, said he finds it strange often how we deal with challenges and solutions, or suggestions and recommendations put forward, especially issues important for the people and to save people’s lives.

“When Covid-19 started, as a committee we were there when it started; we were the committee that was at the coalface; we were right there with every attempt to save lives; we were driven by a slogan that said saving  lives, saving the economy; we were there at the onset and we urged the department to do certain things regarding the coronavirus; the coronavirus infection and the spread of the virus and also combating the spread of the infection; we were there in the beginning when we said that facilities needed to be put in place, we put up a fight for field hospitals, for ventilators, CPAP’s, oxygen etc.”

He added: At every turn when something had been put in place we were the same people who objected to what had been put in place. I find it very strange and illogical that when one realises something is not in place and an attempt is made to put it in place, one then objects to what is being put in place”

Dr Jacobs said the country was caught unaware and unprepared by the coronavirus and realised that there were no regulations put in place to manage coronavirus infection. We then had the National Disaster Regulations put in place.

Dr Jacobs said the regulations contributed in lowering the rise of infections, there is no way we can say that wearing of masks and other non-pharmaceutical interventions should discontinue.

The regulations contributed in lowering the number of infections in the country. He said: “It is also true that we have just come from the summer period and that we will be going into winter next month; countries that have had winter period had experienced an increased number of infections. We are fortunate that this particular variant called Omicron had not been as dangerous since the prevention strategies that had been put in place by the department saved many lives. “

Dr Jacobs urged the Minister and the department to work with speed to gazette these regulations.

The Chairperson’s comments follow remarks by committee Members who rejected the regulations in its current form in the Health Act. Some Members of the committee were of the view that a roundtable discussion to deliberate on issues will be created.

 Dr Jacobs said as a medical scientist, he emphasised that the regulations are extremely important and that every single country must have them in place to manage notifiable diseases and where we have realised that we have a deficit or a gap we needed to fill it.

“An attempt is being made to put something in place to manage challenges of the coronavirus even the possibility of a fifth wave as the country approaches the winter season,” added Dr Jacobs.

**ISSUED BY THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMUNICATION SERVICES ON BEHALF OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, DR KENNETH JACOBS.

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