**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**COMMITTEES COMMEND SUCCESSFUL INTEGRATION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME INTO BASIC EDUCATION**

The Early Childhood Development (ECD) programme, which was previously housed in the Department of Social Development, has now been integrated into the Department of Basic Education. This move aims to ensure that all pre-school children follow a curriculum-based early learning syllabus.

The two departments today briefed a joint meeting of the Portfolio Committee on Basic Education and the Portfolio Committee on Social Development on the latest developments in the process. They reported that on 1 April 2022, the Minister of Social Development officially handed over the ECD function to the Minister of Basic Education.

The move forms part of the policy and programme commitments outlined in the National Development Plan, the governing party’s 54th National Conference and the National Integrated ECD Policy. The integrated ECD policy seeks to provide an overarching multi-sectoral enabling framework of early childhood development services, inclusive of national, provincial and local spheres of government.

The migration has also facilitated a national comprehensive early childhood development programme and support, with identified essential components. Relevant role players have been identified and their roles and responsibilities outlined for the provision of the various components of early childhood development services. The migration also seeks to establish national integrated early childhood development leadership and coordinating structures, the departments said in the briefing.

.The two departments also reported that the governance structures that have been overseeing the function shift process continue to meet in the 2022/23 financial year to ensure that there is a smooth transition.

The Minister of Basic Education, Ms Angie Motshekga, said the transition was smooth and seamless, and will ensure a consolidated and integrated ECD. “If we are to succeed in education as a country we have to get it right at basic level; that’s our ECD. All successful education systems in the world have very robust, strong ECD education. We are monitoring and studying other systems around the world in order to be informed about the best trends in early development education level,” the Minister said.

Her counterpart from the Department of Social Development, Ms Lindiwe Zulu, told the committees that her department will continue to provide support to ECD, despite the move to Basic Education. “We will continue to work with ECDs. We are not dumping them because they are with Basic Education. We will continue to offer our support. This is a journey. We are also responsible for children and families. One of the services we will continue to offer is to ensure that we have as many social workers as possible.

“We cannot afford to have ECD where children just go to eat and sleep, and expect them to be ready for school. There can never be economic productivity if we don’t make sure we start at that level. We reassure Parliament and South Africans that partnerships that are beneficial to the children will be strengthened. We are committed to the children, the parents as well as the ECD practitioners,” said Minister Zulu.

The two portfolio committees commended the smooth migration process. “We commend the successful migration of the ECD programme from Social Development to Basic Education. We also appreciate that there has been some movement since April, and we understand it is still a continuous process. We need continuous engagement with more stakeholders in the ECD sector to get more knowledge on this integration process,” said the Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee on Basic Education Ms Bongiwe Mbinqo-Gigaba.

The committees also welcomed the news that Department of Social Development’s role will continue, and that the two departments will continue to work together on the ECD programme.

Among concerns raised by members of the two committees were the inadequate number of ECD centres to accommodate children living with disabilities. MPs also wanted more details on the planned development programmes for unqualified ECD practitioners to ensure they were trained on what is required by the curriculum.

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