**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**BASIC EDUCATION PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NOTES PROGRESS IN MOVING EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT TO BASIC EDUCATION**

**Parliament, Tuesday, 6 June 2023 –** The Portfolio Committee on Basic Education today received a comprehensive progress report from the Department of Basic Education (DBE) on the shift of the Early Childhood Development (ECD) function to DBE from the Department of Social Development.

The committee heard that 1.3 million children aged between 3 and 5 are not yet attending any form of early learning. The DBE also said the access gap is currently unknown for the 3.5 million children aged 0 to 2. The meeting heard that only 45% of children accessing early learning are developmentally on track. A total of 66% of the poorest children (Q1) are not in early learning programmes (ELPs) compared to 36% of the wealthiest.

The DBE indicated that according to its new service delivery model, after taking over this function, all children in South Africa should have access to opportunities for learning through standardised quality ELPs, good health, adequate nutrition, safety and security and responsive caregiving. These services should be delivered through the various departments, who will need to be held accountable for implementation and outcomes.

The committee also heard that urgent priorities and building enduring systems is the current focus. The plan is to provide universal access to quality early learning and care in a range of spaces that are safe and compliant; implement the National Curriculum Framework (NCF); are properly resourced; have trained staff; and include larger groups.

According to the DBE the new system will focus on people and start by understanding where children and families are, what their needs are and what the gaps are. It intends to use a local lens, meaning the optimal mix of services is defined at local level depending on the area and its identified needs. Furthermore service delivery will no longer be provider-led or market-led, but rather state-led. Government will also target resources on where the need is greatest in order to achieve equity and redress.

The committee heard that population-based planning ensures government can achieve its social justice goals of equity, redress, access, inclusivity and efficiency in ECD service delivery.The DBE further told the committee that in order to achieve this, it will need up-to-date data on current ECD services and demographic data in each education district.

The committee heard that the current Children’s Act is not suited to support the service delivery model of the Basic Education Sector. It was created according to the role and mandate of the Social Development department and it is undermining progress towards the DBE’s priorities for ECD access and quality. Short-term legislative reform for ECD is needed to address the defects of the Children’s Act in order that the DBE can make early progress towards its ECD goals.

Committee Chairperson Ms Bongiwe Mbinqo-Gigaba said the committee noted the progress made thus far after the ECD function moved to DBE. “We will closely monitor the progress of this very important function. This is where the foundation for education is laid for our learners and we therefore need a solid system to ensure progress for all our learners, but especially those of disadvantaged backgrounds.”

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

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