**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

**QUESTION FOR WRITTEN REPLY**

**PARLIAMENTARY QUESTION NO: 1445**

**DATE OF QUESTION: 08 NOVEMBER 2019**

**DATE OF SUBMISSION: 22 NOVEMBER 2019**

**Ms M H Maseko-Jele (ANC) to ask the Minister of Justice and Correctional Services:[🟊215] [Question submitted for oral reply now placed for written reply because it is in excess of quota (Rule 137(8)]**

What measures did his department put in place to strengthen the Offices of the Master of the High Court, with regard to the lengthy waiting periods in winding up deceased estates?

**NW2684E**

**REPLY:**

(a) The Department is implementing a number at measures to improve efficiency in respect at services rendered in the office of the Master at the High Court. Key amongst these is the automation at the process in the Master’s office is the introduction at the Paperless Estate Administration System. Through this system, the Master’s offices are able to render efficient service delivery by responding immediately to enquiries as the information is readily available. We are able to provide copies as the documents are scanned. We can also provide accurate statistics of the Letters of Appointments issued by the Master’s offices as we can draw the reports.

(b) It is also important to note that over the past years the Masters’ work has steadily increased, though the officials attending to the same work have declinedover the same period. The Masters’ Office lack capacity and has a high vacancy rate. In order to address this challenge, processes to fill funded vacant posts in the Masters Office are underway, taking into consideration budget constraints and further cuts with regards to the Department’s allocated budget. The vacant post of the Chief Master is also being filled. The post has been advertised and the closing date is 13 December 2019.

(c) With regards to the period it takes to wind up a deceased estate, it is further important to note that the business processes and timeframes are prescribed in the Administration of Estates Act, and the offices of the Master strive to ensure adherence to these timeframes. When an estate is reported to the Master, the office endeavors to issue the Letter of Appointment within 15 working days from receipt of all required documents.

(d) The process of administering an estate involves third parties and the Master facilitates the interface among the interested parties, which at times fall behind the expected timeframes for reasons beyond the control of the Master. The Executors and other role-players’ (i.e. beneficiaries, creditors etc.) actions influences the timeframe within which an estate is finalised.