



PARLIAMENT
OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT
Portfolio: Social Development

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ATT: Honorable Lindiwe Zulu
Minister for Social Development

CC: Ms Totsie Memela Khambula
CEO for SASSA
Mr Linton Mchunu
Acting DG, Social Development

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12 June 2020

Dear Minister Zulu,

Re: Community halls to be reopened and utilized for SASSA services under alert level 3 lockdown

Prior to the Covid-19 and lockdown, community halls across the country played a vital logistical role in that they brought SASSA services closer for over 18 million vulnerable pensioners, parents, persons with disabilities and many other grant recipients.

Being able to access SASSA services at community halls has meant to many South Africans with no money for transport and access to telephone or email, that they could walk into their local community town hall and have access to SASSA services. Community halls are also geographically located in the heart of communities whereas SASSA offices are more typically found in central business districts.

The last few weeks saw three SASSA offices closed in KwaZulu Natal and two in the Western Cape as a result of staff testing positive for Covid-19. These SASSA offices were closed for decontamination purposes resulting in SASSA clients having to return home unattended with no explanations provided.

Due to a staff member testing positive for Covid-19 case, the SASSA office in Bellville, Cape Town was closed on Tuesday 9 June 2020. This saw pensioners with appointments standing in a long queue, stressed and anxious as the doors were still closed at 09:00am. To this day there is still no communication from SASSA to its clients regarding the reopening of this particular office.

The infection rate will increase as South Africa prepares for the peak of the pandemic to hit between August and September 2020. This will most certainly see a spike in the infection rate of our frontline staff including SASSA officials which will likely see SASSA offices close more frequently.

The reopening of community halls is an immediate solution to the pending crisis brought on by the closure of SASSA office across the country.

The reopening of community halls to render SASSA services will achieve the following:

- More logistically and geographically feasible SASSA service points;
- Shorter distances for clients to travel to which would save on their transportation costs;
- Clients without access to telephone or email access can visit service points and be attended to;
- Where SASSA offices are suddenly closed due to positive Covid-19 cases, clients in queues can be redirected to community halls;
- It will counter the impending backlog of SASSA enquires and applicants as a result of sudden office closures;
- Higher turnover of SASSA clients given that SASSA offices are reported to only be allowing between 30 - 70 appointments per day per office;
- Clients can complete forms on the same day, as opposed to being sent home to complete the form only to return the follow day/week to stand in another queue;
- It would allow for all SASSA staff to report to duty while still respecting the social distancing regulations within the workspace to slow down the spread of Covid-19;
- Less congestion outside of SASSA offices which will make for better social distancing;
- Shorter quicker queues for clients especially in the face of harsh winter elements; and
- Ablution facilities will be available to SASSA clients.

Most importantly, with increased physical access to SASSA services there is potential to eliminate clients sleeping outside SASSA offices giving back our people their dignity and allowing them to exercise their constitutional right to access basic services.

Minister, in the interests of millions of vulnerable South Africans please urgently consider raising the issue of SASSA being allowed to, once again, make use of community halls to provide critical services, under the current alert level 3 risk of the lockdown, at the next National Command Council meeting.

I await your urgent response in this regard.

Regards,

A. Abrahams

Ms. Alexandra Abrahams
Member of National Assembly
Republic of South Africa
Portfolio: Social Development