

Department further handicaps persons with disabilities

by **Sibongiseni Ngcobo MP** – DA Member of the Portfolio Committee on Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities

Thank you, House Chairperson

The Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities has failed dismally. This Department is supposed to be playing a key role in protecting the vulnerable groups in our society and improving their lives. Yet, it has failed at every turn.

This Department has consistently failed to prioritize issues affecting persons with disabilities in this country. It has allocated R17.4 million for programme 4 which deals with the rights of persons with disabilities. This is one of the smallest budget allocations and accounts for just over 8% of the Department's overall budget.

In fact, the Department currently spends more money on its office accommodation than it does on Programme 4: Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This goes to show that it has left persons with disabilities behind.

Today, we still see the exclusion and neglect of persons with disabilities.

The question is, what is the department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities doing to turn this situation around?

The Department has also failed to show how its new regulatory role is going to be incorporated in Programme 4. It is not clear how the Department will regulate the implementation of programmes relating to the rights of persons with disabilities.

The portfolio committee has consistently asked the department to fast track the development of the Disability Rights Bill. What is concerning is that in this financial year there is no target on the department's annual performance plan that tracks the development of this Bill.

The Department has failed to come up with an effective monitoring and evaluation framework to monitor the work that is being done by the Department of Social Development in terms of the services rendered to protect and empower persons with disabilities.

The DA in the portfolio committee of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities recently conducted oversight visits across the country, visiting NGOs in the disability sector.

What we discovered is that the NGOs in this sector are on their knees financially and are no longer able to properly serve the needs of persons with disabilities. One of these NGOs is Jean Weber House which is a boarding facility for persons with disabilities run by the Free State Association for Persons with Disabilities.

This facility currently provides a shelter and essential services for 33 residents and only receives R101 750 from the Department of Social Development (DSD). This money is not enough to cover the costs of basic necessities like electricity, water, medical supplies, and salaries for a driver, health care worker, two cleaners, four cooks, four security guards and twenty-four care workers.

The facility currently has a monthly shortfall of R65 915 and will soon close down if it does not receive adequate funding from government.

Without proper funding for NGOs like this, vulnerable South Africans living with disabilities are at risk of homelessness and losing access to dignified care and education.

Now is the time for Minister Maite Nkoana-Mashabane and her Department to ensure that it properly monitors the services that are being offered to persons with disabilities by government.

Now is the time for the Minister and her Department to rise to the occasion and start listening and responding to the concerns of women, youth and persons with disabilities. As the Democratic Alliance, we will continue to exercise oversight over the Department to ensure that it plays its part in improving the lives of women, youth and persons with disabilities.