

Budget Debate on Vote 22: Correctional Services

Speech by Janho Engelbrecht MP

DA Shadow Minister of Correctional Services

Honourable Members

During this Budget vote it is necessary to take stock of the last financial year's performance. I am sorry to say that after assessing the performance I came to the conclusion that the majority of problems that existed during the last financial year are still prevalent this year.

In terms of measuring performance, one has to look at the Department's core mandate, that is incarceration, rehabilitation and re-integration into communities. In terms of incarceration, overcrowding seems to be a perpetual problem, while the ratio between officials and inmates remains decidedly unsatisfactory. The ever-increasing number of remanded detainees and the department's inability to accommodate them seems unsolvable.

Answering 7 questions might be helpful in this regard, for what it's worth:

1. What are the key factors contributing to the high remand detainee population in South Africa, including systemic inefficiencies, risk assessment practices, and socio-economic factors?
2. What are the international best practices and successful strategies implemented in other jurisdictions to reduce the remand detainee population and alleviate prison overcrowding?
3. How can these strategies be adapted and implemented in the South African context?
4. What is the effectiveness of existing initiatives and interventions in South Africa aimed at addressing the issue of remand detainees and reducing prison overcrowding, such as bail reforms, alternative measures, and case management practices?
5. What are the experiences, perspectives, and needs of remand detainees and key stakeholders involved in their management, including judicial officers, legal professionals, and correctional personnel?
6. How do these perspectives inform potential strategies and interventions?
7. What evidence-based recommendations and policy implications can be proposed to guide relevant stakeholders in implementing effective strategies to reduce the

remand detainee population, improve the efficiency of the criminal justice system, and alleviate prison overcrowding in South Africa?

In terms of rehabilitation and re-integration one needs to look at the recidivism rate in South Africa which remains amongst the highest in the world. This points to failure, are the rehabilitation and up skilling programs within our correctional facilities still relevant and of use? Would an inmate be in a position to acquire a job after being released from incarceration?

In answers to a Parliamentary question about contraband in South African prisons the Minister gave a figure of 37,000 illegal cell phones that was confiscated during the last financial year. During the same period only 24 officials faced disciplinary action relating to contraband.

This creates the perception that corruption in DCS is endemic, with little or no consequences for the perpetrators.

The lack of progress made with recommendations by the Zondo Report, firmly establishes this culture of impunity.

I have to use this opportunity to mention the scandalous inaction of DCS HR Department. The Department signed an agreement with Unions on salaries during 2009. According to an addendum to the agreement, they should have paid members as from March 2017 to March 2020.

The in-service members received their money. Some of the pensioners also received their money while others received only a certain percentage and some received nothing.

The Department told pensioners that an audit needed to be done since 2017. According to the Department the calculations were done incorrectly.

It is 2023 now, six years later, those DCS pensioners are still waiting. Some have died in the meantime without receiving money owed to them by the Department. This is disgraceful.

The dysfunctionality of our parole system and the dire effects thereof on the entire criminal justice system is of great concern. Since the Honourable Lamola became the Minister, he has stated every year without fail, that the parole system is in desperate need of reform and will be reviewed. His term as Minister is almost over and nothing came of this so-called review.

All is however not doom and gloom. I am encouraged by the implementation of the Self-Sufficiency Strategic Framework at all facilities. The savings of R372 million to the taxpayer

over the last 3 years is commendable. To quote Honourable James Selfe “ Prisons work where prisoners work.” I hope this initiative will be expanded.

Further good news is that the JICS Bill was presented to Cabinet on 10 May 2023. The independence of JICS is of critical importance, this bill would hopefully provide that.

The reduction in budget for the financial year means that DCS has to do much better with far less. I am not filled with confidence.