



**MEDIA RELEASE**

**KwaZulu-Natal Social Development: PSA calls on Department to lift suspension of Chief Directors**

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The Public Servants Association (PSA) is disappointed by the delay in finalising the disciplinary hearing against three Chief Directors at the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Social Development.

The process started in 2020 and the three employees have been on precautionary suspension for more than 20 months. According to the PSA's calculations, the combined total in salaries and benefits paid to these suspended employees is more than R9 million, whilst they are rendering no services. The Department has also paid over R6 million for legal costs in this matter, including the forensic investigation, appointment of senior counsel, and a Presiding Officer.

The PSA, representing more than 47 000 public-sector employees in KwaZulu-Natal, views this as wasteful expenditure that must immediately stop. The PSA in January 2021 made an application to the Presiding Officer to lift the suspensions. This was granted in February 2021, notwithstanding the Department's challenge against the ruling through section 145 of the *Labour Relations Act 66 of 1995*.

The Special Investigation Unit (SIU) recommended that internal and criminal charges be laid against those involved. However, the Department failed to present evidence against them in 35 hearing sittings. The PSA regards this as an attempt by the Department to embarrass these workers by placing them on precautionary suspension without tangible evidence linking them to the R22 million scandal. The National Prosecuting Authority also indicated that there was insufficient evidence to prosecute these officials as per the SIU recommendation.

The PSA opposes corruption, but public servants cannot be used as scapegoats in such matters. The employees are ready to report for duty and are demanding that the Department must clear their names in this issue. The Department needs to take accountability for this wasteful expenditure. The PSA calls on the MEC of the Department, Mrs Nonhlanhla Khoza, to immediately lift these suspensions and withdraw all charges against these employees in the interest of justice and fairness. The PSA further appeals to all Public Service Departments to stop abusing the disciplinary process at the expense of dedicated government employees.

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