

MEDIA RELEASE **PSA condemns wasteful expenditure by KwaZulu-Natal Department of Social Development on flawed legal case against Chief Directors**

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The Public Servants Association (PSA) is outraged by exorbitant legal costs incurred by the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Social Development in a protracted case against Chief Directors charged in the infamous 2020 COVID-19 blanket scandal.

Since the charges were laid, the Department has spared no expense in hiring some of the most expensive senior and junior counsel, alongside a judge who has presided over 75 days of hearings. Each day, the Department has paid R200 000 per sitting for both the senior counsel and the judge, amassing an appalling bill of over R20 million in less than three years.

The PSA's investigation reveals that the Department's case against these senior officials is woefully lacking in evidence, reducing the charged Chief Directors to scapegoats in a flawed pursuit of accountability. This excessive expenditure of public funds constitutes wasteful expenditure of the highest order. The PSA had long warned the Department of this impending failure after it could not substantiate allegations against the former acting Head of Department who received nothing more than a warning after being cleared of involvement in the scandal.

Amid this reckless spending, the PSA successfully filed an application, leading to the withdrawal of the precautionary suspensions for these Chief Directors who were at home whilst the Department paid over R5 million in salaries during their unjust suspension. The Department's refusal to drop charges continues to fuel this financial drain, whilst critical resources that could be redirected to crucial areas such as the employment of social workers, are being squandered.

The PSA urges the MEC of Social Development and the Premier of KwaZulu-Natal to intervene immediately. The withdrawal of these baseless charges is imperative to prevent further escalation of costs. The PSA also calls upon the Public Protector to launch an investigation into this gross misuse of public funds that should be channelled towards real solutions such as strengthening the Department's workforce through the employment of social workers, who are desperately needed in communities.

It is alarming that the Department continues to pay R100 000 per sitting for each senior counsel and judge, with no end in sight to the hearings. If unchecked, this case could continue for years, with further millions drained from an already overstretched budget. The PSA stands firm against this blatant waste of resources and will continue to pursue justice and proper governance in the Department of Social Development.

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