

MEDIA RELEASE

PSA welcomes Limpopo SAHRC provincial hearing into the status of school for learners with special needs

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The Public Servants Association (PSA) welcomes the decision by the Limpopo South African Human Rights Commission to conduct provincial hearings into the status of schools for learners with special needs. The PSA previously raised concerns and called on the Limpopo Department of Education to conduct an audit of the status of special schools as the safety of learners with special needs was compromised. Most schools for learners with special needs are not adequately resourced to enable proper support for these learners. It must be noted that the vulnerability of these learners necessitates proper and adequate resources. Provision of ventilation, proper ablution blocks, working showers, and a functional dining hall remains a dream in most of these schools which causes the risk of COVID-19 infections due to poor hygienic conditions.

Sadly, the Department did not bother to conduct a full audit of the status of the schools, which demonstrated by the lack of seriousness, to ensure that the rights of learners with special needs were protected. The PSA believes that the SAHRC hearing will unearth challenges faced by the learners with the special needs and the glaring failures to comply with national norms and standards relating to environmental health in terms of *National Health Act*. Learners with special needs deserve better and cannot be treated as secondary citizens and have the same rights as the so-called 'normal' learners. The right to human dignity is the foundation of many of the other rights in the *Bill of Rights*.

It is encouraging that the SAHRC finally answered the call of many including the PSA regarding the unresponsiveness of the Department regarding the status of these schools. The invitation of a special needs school representative and other stakeholders within the disability sector would provide the opportunity for the Commission to assist learners. The hearing would thus determine the adequacy of departmental support to learners and would also make recommendations and redress which would go a long way in changing the lives and future of learners with the disability in the province.

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