

## Public Protector faces fresh challenge over Vussy Mahlangu appointment

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Public Protector faces fresh challenge over Vussy Mahlangu appointment Politics / 5 January 2020, 09:48am / SAMKELO MTSHALI and MAYIBONGWE MAQHINA Public Protector Advocate Busisiwe Mkhwebane. File picture: Henk Kruger/African News Agency (ANA)Johannesburg - A showdown is looming between Busisiwe Mkhwebane and the Public Servants Association over the employment of the public protector's chief executive Vussy Mahlangu. This is despite Mkhwebane's office announcing on Friday that Mahlangu had resigned and his last day of work is January 31. The PSA had in December made a Promotion of Access to Information Act (PAIA) application enquiring about circumstances into the appointment of Mahlangu, who was dismissed as a deputy director-general in the department of rural development and land reform. The union had, through a letter sent via Sefanyetso Attorneys, asked if Mahlangu had disclosed in his CV and interview his disciplinary record at his previous employment before he was hired at the public protector's office. It also asked if he had been vetted, subjected to integrity checks and underwent security clearance, among other things. The PSA had given Mkhwebane's office until December 18, 2019 to respond. Alfred Mhlongo, a senior manager for legal services at Mkhwebane's office, acknowledged receipt of the PAIA application. "We will revert to you more meaningfully with a response once the information officer has finalised the consideration of your client's request for access," Mhlongo wrote in a letter dated December 18. "We accordingly request an extension of your deadline of December 18, 2019, until January 13, 2020, to enable us to do so. On Saturday, PSA deputy general manager Tahir Maepa said that Mahlangu's resignation would dampen efforts to expose Mkhwebane for not administering proper due diligence when she appointed Mahlangu. "Most importantly, it is also going to delay our information-seeking in a sense that Vussy Mahlangu has a lot of information with regards to shenanigans that are happening in the public protector's office. "We know that it is the public Protector who has coerced Vussy Mahlangu to, in fact, get rid of a number of senior investigators within the public protector's office," Maepa said. He was adamant the PSA would not abandon the PAIA application regardless of Mahlangu's resignation. "We're not going to abandon the PAIA application. We are going to continue with the PAIA application because the issue here is not Mahlangu, it's the public protector herself," he said. He claimed that the office of the public protector was fraught with a purging of staff and that it was going to make it difficult for the PSA's efforts to acquire information that led to their shop stewards being dismissed, charged and placed on suspension. Maepa alleged that Mkhwebane had "dealt systematically" with PSA members who were not willing to "do wrong things". He insisted that that they would go to the highest court in the land if their request was declined. Mkhwebane's spokesperson Oupa Segalwe said the PAIA request from the PSA would be responded to later this month. Segwale said Mkhwebane was unaware of any investigator who has been "gotten rid of" other than those who've been suspended as part of a disciplinary process which was above board and legal. "There is no 'systematic purge' of staff at the public protector South Africa. Claims of playing politics abound and have been for a while, and therefore, not new, but no one has to date come forward with concrete evidence to back them up, only half-truths and innuendo," he said. Political Bureau