



MEDIA RELEASE	COVID-19: PSA warns about effects of failure by DCS to put measures in place
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The Public Servants Association (PSA), representing more than 13 000 employees at the Department of Correctional Service (DCS), believes that the DCS still has no viable plan in place to stop the rapid spread of COVID-19 amongst officials and offenders. More than 5 334 officials and offenders have to date been infected.

Prisons organisations used this opportunity to campaign for the release of offenders based on the opinion prison overcrowding is contributing to the spread of the virus. Despite being involved in extended court proceedings against the DCS regarding prison overcrowding and the official-inmate ratio, the PSA does not believe that overcrowding is the main reason for the rapid spread of the virus in correctional centres. The PSA is furthermore extremely concerned that inmates are released without being screened. This is set to fuel the infection rate in communities. In the face of soaring unemployment, which was aggravated by widespread retrenchments during the pandemic, released offenders will find it extremely difficult to find work and earn a living. It is therefore only a matter of time before some of them will resort to crime to sustain themselves at the expense of embattled communities.

Correctional centres are linked to communities, with officials interacting with other citizens and the DCS is therefore not immune to the virus. Once the virus is present in a correctional centre it is extremely difficult, under current conditions, to contain the spread amongst officials and offenders. The rapid spread of the virus in correctional centres is exacerbated by an irrepressible employer that is not proactive. The PSA tabled several proposals to the DCS in March 2020 already to combat the spread of the virus in centres. The Minister of Justice and Correctional Services and the DCS National Commissioner are yet to implement some of these proposals. The proposal to reduce the shift staff headcount by 50% was only implemented in July 2020. Had this been done earlier, it would have assisted to contain the virus. The PSA also proposed that parolees should not sign attendance when monitored by Community Corrections divisions. A basic measure such as this is yet to be introduced and officials in Western Cape are still expected to pass a register amongst parolees. The PSA in June 2020 already demanded in the National Steering Committee that the DCS should provide transport to its officials who make use of public transport. This will reduce their risk of exposure and, in turn, the risk of infecting offenders in correctional centres. There is also concern about reports from the Free State that stocks of essential personal protective equipment (PPE) will soon run out.

The PSA repeats its calls on the DCS National Commissioner to urgently implement the proposed measures and ensure that enough PPE is delivered to the country's more than 250 correctional centres.

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